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CONTAINING

SEVEN SERMONS,

ADDRESSED TO

YOUNG PERSONS.

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SERMON I.

REFLECTIONS ON MAN, AND ON THE DIVINE CONDUCT TOWARDS HIM.

PSALM viii. 4.

What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?

"THE proper study of mankind is man." This subject merits the earliest attention; for, until we gain some just knowledge of ourselves, we shall be ignorant of our duty to God, and of our capacity, in any way, to honour and serve him. Besides, the character, usefulness, and happiness of every individual depend very much on an acquaintance with himself, and with the rank and situation he holds in the scale of being. Inattention to ourselves, and to the circumstances in which we are placed, will always expose us to errour, and may involve us in remediless evil.

In the morning of life, therefore, and through all its advancing periods, the study of man, of ourselves in particular, should occupy the mind. To call the thoughts of young people to this subject, and assist them in the examination of it, make the principal object of this discourse; which will be followed by several others, intended for the benefit of this class of the community.

As the powers of the youthful mind are brought into exercise and strengthened with growing years, they should be exerted to form correct ideas of the origin, nature, dignity, duty, and destination of man; of his actual condition and capacity, as a subject of moral government; of the relations he sustains, the obligations he is under, the hopes he may cherish, and of his accountability to the author of his existence.

The text presents two leading subjects of contemplation. First, man; secondly, the divine conduct towards him. By examining the former, you will become acquainted with yourselves; by meditating on the latter, you will more clearly perceive your duty to God.

First. "What is man?" This is an interesting inquiry; not as it relates to his physical so

much, as to his moral character; to the organization of his body, as to his intellectual faculties; though in the structure of both he is "fearfully and wonderfully made." But, high in rank as man is disposed to consider himself, the psalmist intimates that, in comparison with other works of the creator, he is scarcely worthy the divine notice and care. The contemplation of the visible heavens, the moon and stars, led him to entertain humble thoughts of man, though made but "little lower than the angels, and crowned with glory and honour." But, waving this thought for the present, let us attend to the inquiry before us.

Finding, my young friends, that you exist, and possess energies of body and mind, or capacities that may be applied to various purposes, an inquiry into the origin and design of your existence and powers ought deeply to engage your attention. Unconscious of any volition, or efficiency, in your own production, you must ascribe your existence and faculties, to some cause without yourselves. This cause you will perceive, from the wonderful organization of your bodies, and more wonderful constitution and endowments of your minds, must have acted with wisdom and design in forming

such creatures as yourselves; and therefore must be intelligent. Who, or what is this intelligent cause of your being and faculties, if it may be sought out, you will feel interested to learn, as soon as you are able to arrange your thoughts, and come to a conclusion on the subject. In this natural and very important inquiry you will never gain satisfaction, until you arrive at this point, viz. That there is an uncreated, self-existent, intelligent, and omnipotent Being, who, by his own underived wisdom and power, hath "formed the earth and the world," with all their inhabitants. This creator is God; and man is his creature; having received from him soul and body, with all their powers and faculties, and being dependent on him for the continuance of life and its comforts.

Fixed in this belief, his nature, rank, and dignity become a subject of investigation and contemplation. It appears from the best light afforded us, that man possesses an animal and spiritual, a sensitive and rational, a mortal and immortal nature. In his animal nature there is no very striking difference between him and other creatures that inhabit the earth; but his intellectual faculties, his perception, reason, re-

flection, understanding, and judgment give him a place among the intelligent offspring of the Deity. Whether he form the connecting link between superiour intelligences and irrational animals is immaterial. It is enough for us to know that God "made him a little lower than the angels, and crowned him with glory and honour; made him to have dominion over the works of his hands," to be lord over this part of creation.

"There is a spirit in man; and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding."

God "teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven." By exercising, and reflecting upon, the powers of your own minds, you will learn, that you bear the image of him that created you, that your reason emanated from the eternal fountain of intelligence. This natural conclusion is authorized by a divine testimony. "God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him." This image of the Deity, which was originally stamped upon human nature, and which it still retains in some degree, did not consist wholly in moral rectitude; but partly in the rational faculties of the

mind. So far as moral rectitude, or perfect innocence, is an impression of the image of the creator on the creature, man has now no claim to the honour. Conscious that he is not in a state of perfect innocence, he must feel that, in this respect, he hath lost his dignity. Under the dominion, or corrupting influence, of sin, he bears no moral likeness to infinite purity and holiness. But, in his reason, or capacity of choosing and acting with design, and for some end, he yet exhibits a faint resemblance of underived wisdom and intelligence. In this view man holds a dignified rank among the creatures of God; and he may be reasonably required to pursue a course worthy of his nature and dignity, and pleasing to the author of his being.

What, then, is his duty, as a rational creature, capable of moral action? We wish our readers to enter most seriously into this inquiry. It is of vast importance. It deeply concerns you, my young friends; as an erroneous opinion, and wrong step, at the commencement of your mortal race, may involve you in consequences fatal to present peace, and to ultimate happiness.

If reason, or a capacity to discern the difference between good and evil, between that which

is agreeable, and that which is opposed, to the holy nature and will of God, be a part of the glory and honour with which man is crowned, it is his duty to obey the voice of reason, to choose and act agreeably to his knowledge of the difference between good and evil. When reason, or moral sense and discernment, fail to govern his determinations and actions, he becomes an offender against God, and against the law under which he is placed; and loses the glory and honour, which distinguished him from inferiour creatures; or tarnishes their lustre, and degrades himself below the rank assigned him. If his intellectual faculties and moral powers emanated from God, and were communicated to give him an honourable elevation in the scale of being, and to fit him for higher service than other creatures can perform, and purer enjoyment than they can receive, it must be his duty to employ them to the divine honour, for the end which God designed by enriching his soul with such gifts. A correct knowledge of ourselves as the creatures of God, endued with rational powers, and subjects of his government, will give clear views and a deep sense of our duty to him. But other considerations than those already suggested will make the matter

more plain, and show, in a very strong light, that our happiness is intimately connected with the proper exercise and application of all our powers, and with the faithful improvement of every talent.

The destination of man is one. Though it should be admitted, that no certain conclusions on this point can be formed by ordinary minds and means from the light of nature; yet from this light only it appears highly probable that man is appointed to another state of existence. On this subject, however, our inquiries must be guided, principally by revelation. This confirms the conjectures which reason forms, and supports the opinion which reflecting persons have conceived from the light of nature, that the existence of human beings is not limited to the short term of the present life. The body, we know, is destined to dissolution and dust. This fact is verified in the history of all the past generations of men. They are gone down to the grave; and all the living expect to follow them. But, beyond death, what is decreed for man? Will he exist conscious of his being, and capable of either happiness, or misery? We say the light of nature, though it does not afford complete assurance to every mind, leads

the thinking part of mankind to believe the affirmative, and to conclude there must be another state of existence for our race. The author of our frame seems to have made this impression on the mind.

> " 'Tis the divinity that stirs within us;
> 'Tis heav'n itself that points out an hereafter,
> And intimates eternity to man."

This doctrine, inferred from natural principles, and agreeing with the strongest and most correct sentiments of the human mind, is attested by a voice from on high. It is revealed and taught by the word of God in the most explicit manner.

Will, then, our future state be affected by any thing we do in the present? Upon this point the holy scriptures, in perfect agreement with the suggestions of sober reason, are clear and decisive. They assure us, that we shall pass from this to a state of righteous retribution; in which we are to receive " according to the deeds done in the body." Man therefore, though at present clothed with mortality, and compassed with infirmities, is an heir of immortality, destined by his creator to pass through this world to scenes unknown, from

this state of probation to a state of just retribution, in which he will be rewarded, or punished, according to his works, or to his true temper and character.

Here, reader, pause——Meditate on the thoughts suggested. Contemplate thyself as a creature of God, " made a little lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honour," fitted for rational service and enjoyment, and appointed to a future judgment, to interminable existence, in another world, with a capacity for happiness or misery. Your origin, nature, faculties, dignity, and destination prove you to be a moral agent, and a proper subject of moral government. An acquaintance with your actual condition, capacity, and duty as such, is of the highest importance to yourself. Into this it is our fervent prayer that you may be led by the proper exercise of your own mind, and by the enlightening influences of the holy spirit.

That he might answer the original design of his creation, retain his primitive glory and honour, and enjoy the continued approbation and favour of his Maker; it was necessary for man to yield sinless obedience to the law under which he was placed by the wise and holy author of his existence. But is this the present

actual condition of man? If not, is he now able to regain his original standing as a subject of moral law and government? These queries, with their proper answers, will present a view, a picture of man, different from what we have been contemplating. By whatever means sin was introduced, the conscience of every person testifies, that his condition is not that of perfect innocence. We do not insist that you should examine and determine this point by any revealed law and rule. Let it be settled, if any choose, by the acknowledged and incontestable principles of natural religion. As these require of rational creatures undeviating rectitude, or obedience to the law under which they are placed, every human being will find he is not in a state of perfect innocence; but that he hath transgressed some known law of his maker, and is guilty in the view of his own conscience. He cannot, therefore, expect to stand acquitted before God on the ground of his own obedience and merit. By the light of his own mind he is convinced, and the divine word brings the conviction home to his conscience, that he is a fallen, sinful creature; or, which is the same thing, that he hath not perfectly obeyed the law of God, or followed the suggestions of his own

reason, which was given to be the director of his conduct. Apply this rule to every case, and all will be *concluded under sin*. Is not this, reader, your actual condition? Will you, will any one presume to say, that he never has offended against the law of his mind? against the light and dictates of his conscience? If not, all must plead guilty before God. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." This conceded, another serious inquiry offers itself to the mind, viz.

Has man ability to recover himself, and to answer, in his own name and person, the just demands of a holy law?

Not to insist on that moral impotence, that want of disposition and inclination to holiness, which are said to be induced by a single act of disobedience; it is a given point, I believe, that creatures owing entire submission and obedience to their creator, can never make satisfaction, or reparation, for one transgression of his law; and, therefore, of themselves can never regain the forfeited favour of heaven. We add, if sin have subjected man to weakness, corrupted the springs of moral action, or, in any way, diminished his inclination and capacity for holy exercises and duties, his future obedience, should

his past transgressions be pardoned, would be less pure and perfect, than that which he at first owed to the author of his life, and of his faculties. His hope, then, as a fallen creature, or as one conscious of transgression, if he have any, must rest on the mercy of God for pardon, and on his gracious assistance in the performance of future duty.

In this view of his case, what hopes may he cherish? On what foundation can such hopes be raised and supported? To these natural and interesting questions, the gospel of Christ offers the only satisfactory answer. Though the hopes of nature are destroyed, yet the christian religion brings "life and immortality to light," presents to the eye of faith an all-sufficient Saviour, chosen and appointed of God to reconcile sinners to himself, reveals the purposes of divine wisdom, mercy, and grace, communicates all necessary instruction, and promises all needed assistance. By it "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again into a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the

power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time." Man, therefore, in his present actual condition as a sinful creature, may cherish the hope of pardon, and of ultimate perfection and blessedness, *through the abundant mercy of God in Jesus Christ.*

From these views of him, it is evident, man sustains a relation to this and to another world, to beings and things on earth, to intelligent creatures of a higher order, and to the adorable author of his existence. Though he dwell here, and is connected with the inferiour inhabitants of this globe, he is allied to angels, and, when his present connection with sublunary things shall be dissolved, will pass into the society of those, who surround the throne of God, or of those, who, having rebelled, are "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day."

From these relations correspondent obligations and duties naturally result. It is impossible to reflect upon them without perceiving that we are obliged, in the reason and fitness of things, to cultivate a disposition, and preserve a behaviour, towards those beings to whom we stand in relation, suited to their nature and just claims, and to our own rank and capacity. This

being conceded, we must be bound to observe some law and rule in our own temper and conduct, as well towards our fellow-men and inferiour creatures, as towards their and our creator. Descendants from one common father, and subjects of one Lord, there is a natural bond of union, or a relation, which demands our attention, and binds us to certain duties; the measure of which will be best determined by a proper regard to ourselves, and a correct idea of our own rights. Our first duty and highest obligations are to God. All others are subordinate; though the faithful discharge of every duty comes into the general notion of obedience to the divine law.

Originating from God, endued with a rational and immortal nature, " made a little lower than the angels," destined to a future state of retribution, placed under a dispensation of grace, cherishing the hope of endless felicity, sustaining a relation, not to the creatures of this lower world only, but to the higher orders of created intelligences, and to the underived source of being, the father of the universe; man must be an accountable subject of his government, and amenable to him for his behaviour, and for the improvement of all the talents he hath received.

By considering what man is, you will learn for what end he was created, and what constitutes his highest dignity. His origin, powers, and all the circumstances of his existence, show that he was made to render to his creator a reasonable service, to glorify him in body and spirit, and to be in all things obedient to his will. Conformity to this design is man's glory and happiness; departure from it his degradation and ruin. Therefore, reader, *know thyself*. This branch of knowledge, though least esteemed and cultivated, is of the first necessity. Without some attainments in it, thou wilt never understand thy duty, or interest; nor how to apply thy powers and faculties to any valuable purpose. But intimate acquaintance with thyself, with thy nature, capacity, condition, and destination, will enable thee to perceive, and incline thee to choose, the path marked out by thy creator; which leads to "glory, honour, and immortality." The powers thou possessest are talents given to be occupied, not hidden, buried, neglected, or misimproved. They fit thee for noble employments, and pure enjoyments; for the service of thy God, and for endless progression in moral refinement and happiness. Think, then, how thou oughtest to ap-

ply them, for what principal end they should be exerted. If communicated by the author and preserver of thy life, ought they not to be employed to his honour and glory, according to his apparent design? If they constitute the dignity of thy nature, and stamp upon thee the image of thy creator, by a misimprovement, or misapplication of them, thou wilt degrade thyself, and abuse the gifts of heaven. If thou perverttest the wise and benevolent intentions of thy maker, thou wilt dishonour him, and destroy the foundation of thine own peace and happiness.

To preserve his rank in creation, and realize the good designed for him, every creature must act according to the law of his nature, and to the light he enjoys. Upon this principle a correct knowledge of thyself will show thee, reader, that thou art bound to "fear God, and keep his commandments;" to employ thy rational faculties and moral powers in his service; and that this is the only way to promote thine own real honour and felicity, or to answer the great end of thine existence. These conclusions and impressions will result from an attentive examination of thyself, or from the careful study of man. But they will become deeper, stronger,

and more effectual upon thy heart and life, by contemplating,

Secondly, The divine conduct towards men.

God is mindful of man, and visiteth the son of man. He makes our feeble race the charge of his providence. Like a kind parent, he bears us on his mind, and adapts his favours to our necessities; is ever attentive to our condition, and more ready than an earthly father to give good things to them that ask him.

Had it not been for his sustaining hand, his watchful and benignant eye, his guardian providence, you, my young friends, would never have possessed, as you do at this moment, the vigour and activity of youth. The vigilance and solicitude of the fondest parents could not have saved you from the grave, nor supplied your wants. Though you may have been unmindful of God, he hath been ever mindful of you. He is the preserver of men. You not only derived your being, powers, and faculties from him; but have been always dependent upon him for the preservation of life, always the objects of his kind attention, and partakers of his bounty.

Hath, then, the Lord of the universe, whom angels worship, and before whom archangels

veil their faces, condescended to notice man, and to visit him with tokens of parental tenderness? Hath he had respect to your condition, guarded your helpless infancy, and encompassed you in the arms of his providence to this very hour? These thoughts ought to affect your minds, to excite your admiration and gratitude, and prepare you to enter into the views and feelings of the devout psalmist, thus expressed. "When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and stars which thou hast ordained, what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man that thou visitest him?" Contemplating the visible heavens, those stupendous works which declare the glory of God, and proclaim his wisdom and power; how diminutive man appears in comparison with them! The psalmist seems to express wonder, that he should be an object of the divine notice and care. But he magnifies the wisdom and condescending goodness of God, by intimating that, however inconsiderable he is in the comparison, the heavens were made, their orbs arranged, and their revolutions determined, with a view to the benefit and delight of man, who is "made a little lower than the angels," and to whom God hath given dominion over the inferiour creatures.

Though "fearfully and wonderfully made," man, even in his original dignity and perfection, was to be reckoned among the less stupendous and magnificent works of the creator. He exhibited no such strong marks of wisdom and power, as the heavens display to every eye. But being endued with reason, he was "crowned with glory and honour," constituted a moral agent, and a subject of moral government. As such, God is mindful of him, and visits him in a way suited to his nature, condition and character.

But, considering him in his present degraded and sinful state, with how much greater wonder we may exclaim, "Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him?" How great thy condescension, mercy, and goodness, that thou shouldest make so unworthy a creature the care of thy providence, the subject of thy grace, and the object of thy benevolence! God hath entertained thoughts of mercy concerning our fallen race, hath visited and redeemed us from the ruins of the apostacy, hath sent his Son into our world, to seek and save that which was lost, and through him is now giving us all things richly to enjoy. His providence is concerned

in our preservation, and in every thing that relates to our present or future happiness. His watchful eye is ever upon us; his hand holds and guides us; his bounty supplies our returning wants; and his power preserves our souls from death. Convinced of these truths, each will acknowledge with the psalmist. "O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my down sitting, and mine uprising, thou understandest my thoughts afar of. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth

as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee. For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance, were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand; when I awake, I am still with thee." How sublime, how impressive is this description of the divine conduct towards man! Remember that wherever you are, whatever may be your employment, or your secret devices and practices, by night or by day, you are still with God. He beholds all that you do, and understands your thoughts afar off, long before you have conceived them. What an idea! A being of spotless purity, who hath formed and fashioned you, and who will bring you into judgment; compasseth your

path and your lying down, and is perfectly acquainted with all your ways! Every thought, word, and action, is open to his view, and by him approved, or condemned. Is this true? and can you realize the truth of it? What, then, ought to be your temper and conduct? Think soberly upon the subject, upon your own nature, condition, and destination, and upon the ways of God towards you, and you will find no difficulty in coming to a right conclusion in regard to what is your duty, and what will constitute your highest dignity and happiness. You will perceive that the author of your being hath formed and capacitated you for the exercises of religion, for the rational and refined pleasures of piety and virtue, and that you are under a natural and moral obligation so to employ all your powers and faculties, as to promote the glory, and secure the approbation of your maker and judge. This natural and just conclusion, to which you will be led by a proper acquaintance with yourselves, is strengthened by the consideration that God hath ever been your preserver, your kind almighty friend, your gracious redeemer, your bountiful benefactor. All the good you possess is from him, all you hope to receive must flow from the same source, or

never be realized. Meditate on these truths, and apply them to your own hearts; and you will then make a right improvement of this discourse. You will learn that God made you to serve him, to obey his law, to perform the duties and enjoy the pleasures of religion and virtue. May a deep sense of these things be impressed on your youthful minds, and serve to fortify you against every temptation, and induce you to act worthy of your character as rational creatures, worthy of your rank in the scale of being, worthy of your high destination as the heirs of immortality. Never suffer yourselves, my young friends, to sink below the dignity of your nature, by prostituting the powers of your minds to vain and wicked purposes, or by yielding your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin. Never relinquish the hopes set before you in the gospel of Christ. But, while you cherish a firm belief that God compasseth your path, and is acquainted with all your ways, live in time for eternity, in this world with a view to another. Be sober, be vigilant, and watch unto the end, and we will not cease to pray, that, in respect to pure religion and to every moral and social virtue, our sons may be as plants, grown up in their youth, and our

daughters as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace, and adorned with all the graces which become women professing godliness; and that all may be consecrated to God as living temples, and heirs of his heavenly kingdom.

SERMON II.

REMEMBRANCE OF THE CREATOR IN YOUTH.

ECCLESIASTES xii. 1.

Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.

THE wisdom of this advice requires no illustration. Attention to it, my young friends, is equally your duty, and your security. You owe it to God, and to yourselves. Neither sex, nor circumstances in life, can free you from this obligation. Nor is it required of youth only, to be mindful of their creator. "Young men and maidens, old men and children; let them praise the name of the Lord; for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven."

The text, indeed, is an address to the young; and is therefore chosen for the theme of our

discourse to youth; who are called upon in their early years to be mindful of their creator. But what they are now commanded to do, has ever been the duty of those more advanced in age. The subject, then, though directly addressed and applied to youth, will admonish, instruct, or reprove, those of riper years, at whatever period of life. The method we shall pursue in discussing it, will be, To consider the general obligations to remember our creator; to shew what this implies; and to point out some particular reasons why this duty should be attended to in the days of youth.

I. The general obligations to remember our creator will be considered.

These obligations result from the nature, reason, and fitness of things. God is our creator, the former of our bodies, and the father of our spirits. From him we received our being, and all our powers and faculties. We are his workmanship, "fearfully and wonderfully made," and fitted for a rational service; which we are bound to render to him. As the creator had an unquestionable right to assign to every creature his rank in the scale of being, and to require of each the improvement of the powers he hath given it, according to his own good

pleasure, man must be subject to the same general law, and obliged to employ his faculties in such manner, as shall be most for the divine glory. In whatever he does, in the exercise of all his powers, he is to have a regard to his creator, and be obedient to his will.

As God is the former of your bodies, you must be bound to "yield your members as instruments of righteousness unto him." As he planted the ear, you are to hear the law from his mouth, listen to the declarations of his mind, and attend to the warnings, threatenings, and promises of his word. If deaf to these, and attentive to things that are vain, unprofitable, wicked, and profane; that corrupt the heart, and draw its affections from God, you will abuse his gift, by prostituting it to a purpose for which it was not designed.

As he formed the eye, that we may view his works, and discern his wisdom, power, and goodness, we should turn it "away from beholding vanity," and fix it upon objects that will raise our admiration, reverence, and love of him, who created the heaven and the earth, and constituted the whole frame of nature. Looking through the wonderful variety of nature's works, we shall perceive in them a bright

display of the perfections of their author, which may enkindle the spirit of devotion in the soul. As the eye is in some measure an index of the mind, so it is an avenue to the heart, through which external objects pass, and influence its affections. That these may be pure and holy, we must "make a covenant with our eyes" not to look upon things that will excite vile affections, and turn the heart from God. The power of vision is not given, that we may look covetously on the things of others, amuse ourselves with vanities, or mark any thing out as a prey to dishonest wishes; but to serve the necessary purposes of life, enable us to discover, and lead us to admire and adore, the perfections of the Deity. Mindful of him, and of the end for which he hath endowed us with our several faculties, we shall feel an obligation to employ each to his glory.

Furnished with the organs of speech, our tongues are not in such a sense our own, that we are at liberty to use them to the dishonour of him that formed them. They are given by the creator, that we may "speak of his righteousness, and of his praise all the day long." If this were the practice, as it is the duty, of all classes of people, a mighty and no less happy

change would be observable in the state of society, and of religion. But, in defiance of moral obligation, and of the common rules of decency, the contrary practice is extremely prevalent. How often, even in polite circles, and among persons of refinement in other respects, is the tongue employed in profaning the name, instead of speaking of the righteousness and celebrating the praises of God; in uttering falsehood and slander, seducing and injuring others! Duly sensible of their obligation to employ every faculty to the honour of their creator, men would avoid all manner of filthy communication which tends to debauch the mind, and corrupt good manners, and would speak the truth in their hearts.

The more noble any faculty is, the more dangerous is the abuse of it. The power of speech is justly ranked among the superiour gifts of God; but the tongue, when the use and design of it are perverted, becomes a powerful instrument to inflame carnal desires, rouse the worst passions of the heart, and to disturb the peace of society. The devout person, therefore, retaining God in his thoughts, will pray, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, keep the door of my lips." He considers every abuse,

or misapplication, of his members to be a violation of his obligation to that being, by whom they were fashioned, and in whose book they are all written. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service;" a service which you owe to him, reasonable in itself, and happy in its consequences.

If, then, our bodily organs are to be employed in subserviency to the divine glory, because God is the former of our bodies; as he is also the father of our spirits, our mental faculties and energies must be consecrated to him. Receiving the breath of life from God, man "became a living soul." This is his noblest part, most exalted in its powers, and capable of the most refined pleasure and enjoyment. By it he is allied to heaven, and is of the kindred of the upper world. Upon it the image of God was originally impressed; and, though defaced, is yet so far retained, as his intellectual faculties bear a resemblance to the Supreme Intelligence. Emanating from him, the soul should be mindful of its origin, and of its relation to its divine parent, that every faculty may be applied to the duties resulting from this relation. The human

soul is formed for intimate communion with God, for the enjoyment of its creator; and is debased when drawn from him by the lusts of the flesh, or the vanities of the world. Considering it an emanation from the father of spirits, capacitated for the pleasures of virtue and innocence, for the elevations of piety and devotion, how it must sink from its native dignity, to delight in sensuality, to employ its powers upon inventions of wickedness, and to make the world its hope, its God! Thus degraded in its temper, sentiments, affections, and views, it receives no real satisfaction from the objects of its desire. They are not suited to its nature, and can afford but little enjoyment. To be truly happy, it must rise to its native heaven in its views, and aspire after the nearest resemblance of its creator; not sink to the earth, and there seek its portion.

Among men, the well born, those who are of noble birth, are fond of reflecting upon their descent, and generally feel an obligation to refrain from every thing low and mean, and inconsistent with the supposed dignity of their family. If there be any propriety, any fitness, in such ambition, how much more proper is it that all, being the children of God by creation,

should keep in mind their high descent, and abstain from every thing unworthy their noble origin, and their relation to a being of infinite purity! Tracing their lineage up to this common father, all are born equal, and the little distinctions in the circumstances of their birth lose their importance. The son of a prince, the heir of a temporal crown, and the son of a peasant, destined to pursue the humbler walks of life, are children of the same father in heaven, heirs of the same dignity, and alike bound to prove their relation to God, and to another world, by despising the sins and follies of this, and obeying the ordinances of heaven.

The obligation to remember our creator is heightened by the consideration that he is the author, not of our existence only, but also of our well being, of our comforts and hopes. His constant visitation upholds our spirits. "In him we live, move, and have our being; his open hand satisfieth the desire of every living thing; all eyes wait on him, and he giveth them their meat in due season." Having formed the curious structure of the body, and implanted in it a rational and immortal spirit, he hath made provision to satisfy our animal desires, and for our rational pleasure and enjoyment; and is

daily loading us with benefits, and crowning our lives with loving kindness. In our preservation, and the supply of our wants, his providence is always concerned. Thus mindful of us, and daily visiting us with favour, how reasonable is it that we should keep our creator in grateful remembrance. A noble and generous mind feels its obligations to a benefactor, and conceives it the greatest baseness to be unmindful of him, and unthankful for his kindness. Apply this general sentiment, in the case before us, and ask if receiving the bounties of providence in rich abundance, your minds ought not to be led up to the giver of "every good and perfect gift." If God made you for the display of his glory, and to partake of the streams of his goodness, it must be wrong not to remember him, and your obligation to him. Contemplate the wisdom, power, and goodness, displayed in our formation, in the rank assigned us, in the faculties given us, in the provision for our happiness, in a superintending providence, and reason will discover, and the mind feel, a high obligation to remember our creator with grateful affections. But this conviction, this sentiment, will be more strongly impressed upon the heart, when we call into view the great mystery of

redemption by Jesus Christ. By prostituting his rational faculties and moral powers, man lost the image of God, became guilty in the eye of the divine law, and subject to its dreadful penalty. Thus fallen from his original dignity and glory, his hope was destroyed, and he had no power to deliver himself from the fatal consequences of his apostacy. But this "was a time of love, not that we loved God; but that he loved us, and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins. God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life." The plan of redemption is an astonishing exhibition of divine benevolence. God hath created man anew in Christ Jesus, begotten him again to a lively hope, opened the way for the recovery of his moral image, and to "glory, honour and immortality." In the gospel he hath published "good tidings of great joy to all people," and proclaimed his readiness to pardon our sins, and exalt us to a state of ineffable joy and felicity. The gracious purposes of redeeming love he is still carrying on by means suited to the nature and capacity of man, and to his own adorable wisdom and goodness.

Review the general grounds of obligation to remember your creator. Your life, bodily and mental faculties, preservation, comfort, enjoyment, and all your hopes and happiness for time and eternity spring from him. You are, therefore, bound by the most sacred ties to honour him with your bodies and spirits. The author of your existence hath a right to your devout homage, to the improvement of your faculties in his service. Creation, preservation, the gifts of nature, the blessings of providence, and the richer blessings of redeeming grace, all conspire to bring the human soul under a bond to employ its thoughts upon God, and to raise its affections and desires to him. Convinced of this we shall consider,

2. What remembering our creator implies.

Remembering, applied to a particular subject, often intends the actual performance of certain duties, or such a sense of obligation to perform them, as shall have an abiding influence upon our conduct. We are to remember the commandments of God, to do them: that is, to consider that they are binding upon us, and obey them. We are to "remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy;" that is, to consider

the divine institution of it, and attend to its sacred duties. Much in the same sense we are to remember our creator, and the duties we owe to him. We are to maintain such a constant and realizing apprehension of his being, perfections, and government, as shall inspire us with love for his character, confidence in his wisdom and goodness, and a disposition to yield universal obedience to his will. Any thing short of this is below the import and design of the text. The simple recollection that we are his creatures, and that God is our creator, can answer no better purpose in promoting his glory, and securing our own happiness, than the faith of devils, who only believe and tremble. They who are not affected with the perfections of the Deity, which are demonstrated in his works, who are not impressed with a belief of his universal providence, and with his redeeming grace, so as to find their hearts and lives drawn into a conformity to his character and will; but adopt the impious language of unbelief, "What is the Almighty that we should serve him? or what profit shall we have if we pray unto him?" will come short of the spirit of the text. As this enjoins a general duty, from the obligations of which none are exempted, it may be proper to

be a little more particular, and notice some instances in which persons remember their creator according to the intent of the admonition.

1. It implies such unshaken faith in his existence, such clear and consistent ideas of his attributes, such strong persuasion of the rectitude of his government, and of the wisdom and goodness of all his dispensations, such a realizing apprehension of the amiableness, excellency, and perfection, of his character, that we are filled with admiring and adoring thoughts of him, and are not only disposed to worship, serve and obey him, but cheerfully to resign ourselves to his will, place our highest happiness in his approbation, and our strongest hopes in his mercy and faithfulness. In these views, feelings, and affections, our duty and interest are combined, piety and security connected. For "they who trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abideth forever. He that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about. Blessed is the man who trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green, and shall not be

careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit." Suitably remembering our creator implies this trust, this hope in God, this resignation to him, and a confident expectation that he will, in his own way and time, fulfil his gracious promises.

2. Remembering our creator implies a reverence for the institutions of religion, and the sincere worship of him, according to his own appointment. Without these we shall practically cast contempt upon his authority, and violate the rules of his holy word. Our religious worship and service must have God for their object, and not be directed to any other. He challenges our homage as his special right. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me. I am the Lord, that is my name, and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images. God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." To do this sincerely, uprightness of heart and a conscientious regard to the instituted times and forms of worship are requisite. So far as his will is made known, *that* is to govern the temper of the heart, and to regulate the time and manner of our devotions. We have it in charge from him, to "remember the sabbath day,

to keep it holy;" and "not to forget the assembling of ourselves together." Here time and manner are expressly appointed; and he who disregards either, does not suitably remember his creator and reverence his authority.

Observing the appointed seasons, and the instituted forms, our worship of God must be suited to his character; must be rational, pure, and spiritual, regular, decent, and in order. We are not, at particular times and places, to be carried off in the blaze of misguided zeal, while we have little or no regard to the "weightier matters of the law;" but to maintain an habitual reverence for the object of our worship, and a constant desire to fulfil all righteousness. Since God requires a reasonable service, it will be no breach of charity to suppose some, like Nadab and Abihu, "offer strange fire before the Lord;" but more offer none at all. Neither of these entertain just ideas of the divine character, nor of their duty to God. They do not so remember their creator, as to be influenced in their conduct, or exercise the true spirit of devotion. They neither make him the object of their worship, nor his law and will the rule of it.

3. Remembering our creator implies also a conscientious regard and obedience to his whole will, however made known. Just conceptions of the being and perfections of God, of his government and law, and of our dependence and obligation, will teach us to "deny all ungodliness and worldly lust," to watch against every temptation, to allow no act of disobedience; but to "live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world, giving all diligence to make our calling and election sure," by unremitted attention to all the commands of God, whether they relate to our duty to him, ourselves, or fellow-men.

In fine, remembering our creator implies such habitual reflections upon his being and attributes, upon his character and government, upon his right, as the author of our existence, the preserver of our life, the source of our mercies, and the God of our salvation, to our devout homage and service, as shall incline our hearts to him, and engage us to seek his honour, and to trust our perfection and happiness to his mercy and goodness. It is the first principle of real religion, which operates upon the human mind, corrects the will, draws the affections to their proper object, directs the conduct

of life, and inspires the soul with a filial temper towards its father in heaven, with penitence, and with religious hope and gratitude.

We now pass to offer,

III. Some particular reasons to enforce upon youth the duty of remembering their creator. "Remember now thy creator in the days of thy youth."

To retain God in their thoughts is not the exclusive duty of the young. The obligation lies upon persons of every age. It results from his being their creator, preserver, and redeemer; from the apparent design of their creation, their powers, and faculties; from clear intimations of the divine will, and from a due regard to their own happiness. These considerations apply with equal force to all ages and classes of mankind.

But some special reasons may be offered, why the young should habituate themselves to remember their creator in the days of their youth. In the early periods of life the mind is most susceptible of deep and lasting impressions. These, according to their nature, whether good or bad, very generally form the character of the man, and determine his course. The eagerness and pliability of the youthful

mind, as well as the heat and impetuosity of youthful passions, expose the young to temptations not experienced in riper years, and render them more liable to be overcome. Habits are formed in youth, and take deep root. When reason is strengthened, and the natural ardour abated, it is found very difficult to correct, or change, the habits of early life. It is doubtful whether they are ever so eradicated, as not to have some influence upon the temper and conduct to the close of life. Impressions and habits come under the same general law, and conform to the same principles in human nature. Made and formed in youth, they are apt to accompany a person, in defiance of his reason and better judgment, through every succeeding period of his mortal existence. It is therefore of vast importance that serious impressions be made, and sober correct habits formed, while the heart is tender, the affections warm, and the mind active. If, in the days of youth, the mind be most easily affected, most ready to receive impressions of every kind; if these impressions lead to habits, and habits influence future conduct, and form the character; if such impressions and habits are most lasting and unconquerable; if juvenile years be most liable to

temptation and folly; then is the time to seek the restraints and aids of religion, to remember their creator, "to set the Lord always before their face," and consider that he "compasseth their path, their lying down and rising up, and is acquainted with all their ways."

Proper conceptions of the divine character, of our obligation to God, and relation to him, and of the duties resulting from our relation and dependence, are the foundation and spring of virtue and piety; but ignorance, or unmindfulness, of the creator, is an inlet to all the vices peculiar to youth; and which often load riper years with their baneful fruit.

The mind is prone to retain the bias, or inclination, it first receives.

"Just as the twig is bent, the tree's inclin'd."

On this principle in our nature is founded the sacred injunction upon parents, to *bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.* "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." If this be a reason and motive for parental attention to the infant mind, temper, and conduct; it is an equally forceable argument, that youth, who are become capable

of moral action, should learn that wisdom, the beginning of which is the fear of the Lord, and habituate themselves to act in obedience to its dictates. If so happy as to have been trained to this from infancy, in remembering their creator, they will feel a lively gratitude to him for the pious care of their parents, to form their minds to an acquaintance with him, and with their duty. But if, as with many it is the unhappy case, they have received no early instruction from parents, or never been taught to know the Lord, or to realize their dependence upon him, and accountableness to him; still they are not excusable in choosing to "live as without God in the world." Some knowledge of his being, perfections, and government they must have acquired, notwithstanding their disadvantages, and therefore cannot be excused from the duty of remembering their creator in the days of their youth.

Under the law the first fruits of the field, of the flocks, and of the herds, were to be devoted to the Lord. And are not the first thoughts, affections, and services, of the rational soul to be employed to his glory, and consecrated to his honour? Is he not entitled to the dew of thy youth? to the earliest services and honours in

thy power to render? Sentiments of filial duty may lead you to perceive what you owe to our universal parent. If bound to honour your father and mother, must you not much more be obliged to remember your creator, and be obedient to him?

The infant is not more dependent on its immediate parents for its preservation and support, than all human beings are upon their creator for the continuance of life, the bounties of providence, and blessings of grace. Nothing therefore can be more reasonable, than that your thoughts should be fixed upon him, and your hearts and lives governed by his law, since you are absolutely dependent upon him for all you possess, or hope to enjoy.

Should you pass the days of your youth unmindful of God, and regardless of his law, what restraint will be imposed upon your passions? What prevent your running into the excess of folly and wickedness? In justice God may withhold his restraining grace, and leave you to rush into the most reprehensible and reproachful sins; into crimes that will bring you to publick shame, and, possibly, subject you to the highest penalty of human laws. To the want of early piety, or of an early habit of fixing the

thoughts upon God, as a being who understands all our ways, and to whom we must give account, may be traced those crimes, which have marked with infamy, or brought to an untimely grave, many of your fellow beings.

Real and peculiar advantages result from early piety. "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." It gives dignity to youth, and extorts from the unprincipled some proof of the secret apprehension they have of superiour worth. This worth excites their envy, but their envy shews their consciousness of superiority in the object of it. In the hour of temptation nothing can afford so great security as habitual mindfulness of the creator. This guards against the most trying, by suggesting the thought, "How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" Its effects are seen in the son of Jacob, sold by his envious brethren into Egypt. Assaulted in his youth by a powerful temptation, he resisted it with firmness, because his mind was fixed upon God and his law. The temporary effect of his virtue was unpleasant; but God overruled it for his advancement to power, honour, and dignity. In the course of a wise providence he was ex-

alted above his enemies; but his undissembled piety and virtue rendered him benignant and forgiving to those who had sought his life.

The proper remembrance of your creator in the days of youth will preserve you from a thousand snares, temptations, and sorrows, into which the thoughtless multitude are hurried, and by which they are often loaded with disgrace, or involved in ruin. But, if this evil were not to be apprehended from the neglect of so important a duty, an early acquaintance with religion, and habitual attention to the duties of it, will render its exercises delightful to the soul. As the youthful mind is most free from prejudice, and susceptible of good impressions, so the heart is like to be more firmly established in the principles and habits of piety and virtue by cultivating them in the morning of life; the fruit of which will be peace, hope, comfort, and joy in the various stages of your present existence, and their ultimate reward will be glory and blessedness in heaven. Be entreated, then, "in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning," to give to God "the dew of thy youth." Then you may hope he will satisfy you with life, and show you his salvation; that he will guide you with his counsel, and be your unchangeable portion.

SERMON III.

MOTIVES AND ENCOURAGEMENTS TO EARLY PIETY.

PROVERBS viii. 17.

I love them that love me, and those that seek me early shall find me.

In the context wisdom is personified, and represented as addressing herself to the children of men. Our object is to invite the attention of all, of the young in particular, to the calls of wisdom, which are the calls of God, to a devout and holy life. "Doth not Wisdom cry? and Understanding put forth her voice? She standeth in the top of high places, by the way in the places of the paths. She crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors; unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of men. O ye simple, un-

derstand wisdom; and ye fools, be ye of an understanding heart. Hear, for I will speak of excellent things; and the opening of my lips shall be right things. For my mouth shall speak truth, and wickedness is an abomination to my lips." Thus the wisdom, or word of God puts forth its voice, and challenges the reverence and attention of mankind. In every situation and condition it addresses the sons of men, and calls upon them to be wise, that is pious, virtuous, and holy.

By wisdom and understanding, as properties of men, are intended true religion. "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding." In loving God, Jesus Christ, and the religion he taught, men love wisdom itself; and possessing this holy temper, the wisdom of God shall dwell and delight in them. If they early seek and cultivate it, they have a promise of success. No reasonable grounds of apprehension that they shall fail exist. The Holy One, in the name and character of wisdom, says, "I love them that love me, and those that seek me early shall find me." All that is required of men in this passage, is early and sincere attention to the principles and duties of religion. To this they are encouraged

by God's gracious assurance that, on condition of their loving him, and seeking him early, they shall find him, and be objects of his love.

The truly religious are the truly wise. Religion is the wisdom to be sought, and is promised to those who seek it early. To impress the subject upon the minds of youth, and gain their consent to become wise and good, we shall state the reasonableness and importance of religion; and then show how necessary it is, and what encouragement is given them, to make it the object of their first attention and care.

I. We shall state the reasonableness and importance of religion.

By religion I intend that knowledge, fear, love, and reverence of God, and that faith in Jesus Christ and his gospel, which shall produce holy affections of heart, and the fruits of righteousness, or undissembled piety and goodness. Pure and undefiled religion is the service which rational creatures owe their creator. It requires us to "present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which is our reasonable service." In the general idea of religion many particular duties are included. Several forms of expression, such as faith, holiness, goodness, righteousness, godliness, im-

ply the whole of religion. But general terms include all the particular branches of duty.

Were man innocent, his religion would consist in such affections and conduct towards God and his fellow beings, as should preserve him in this happy state. But, as he has become sinful, the religion suited to his present condition includes repentance. This necessarily belongs to the religion of every creature that has offended against God. By repentance we mean a conviction of sin, a deep and sincere sorrow for it, a renunciation of it, and a strong desire to be freed from its dominion and defilement. The religion of man, therefore, does not intend absolute, universal and perfect conformity to the law and will of God; but it must consist, in part, in pursuing the way he has pointed out to obtain pardon, and restoration to holiness and happiness. This way is "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ," which shall so operate upon heart and life, as to bring the person to a conformity to the spirit and precepts of the gospel.

But, not to enlarge upon what religion is in all its particular duties, and as it relates to the subjects and object of it, we will only observe, that the seat of it is the heart, and that it means,

in general, a right temper and conduct towards God and man: such a faith, repentance, and holy obedience, as shall, according to the dispensation of grace, render man a fit object of the divine complacency.

The reasonableness and importance of such a religion are manifest. Can it be conceived that any thing is more reasonable in itself, or of greater importance to man, than that his temper and conduct should be right in respect to his maker, and fellow creatures? On this his own happiness depends. It is the only ground on which he can hope for the divine approbation, which he considers, if correct in his judgment, the highest felicity. "The favour of God is life, and his loving kindness better than life."

The light of nature teaches that rational creatures are required to love, fear, reverence, and obey their creator. This is a natural dictate of reason. No person in his senses will dispute this point. But the mission, office, and sufferings of the Saviour present the most affecting proof of the importance of religion. He appeared in the world to raise men to the knowledge and practice of it, and sealed its truth with his own blood. Called to the exercises of it by such a friend, who exemplified its duties, and vindicated its principles, it must appear a

reasonable and important duty to follow his steps. Besides, in religion nothing hard and unreasonable is to be found. "Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." There is nothing difficult, or discouraging, in true religion, to one that has a taste for it. But, were it otherwise, it would be a reasonable homage to the Creator, and of high importance to ourselves. It promotes his glory, is connected with our own present and future happiness, and communicates blessings to fellow mortals. "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." It has a benign influence upon external circumstances, and on the temper of the mind. It suppresses, or moderates, the turbulent passions, which often fill the soul with anguish and confusion, while it gives full scope to all the sweet, pure, and benevolent affections. It breathes peace, adds dignity to the human character, and leads up to the celestial paradise. God hath promised "eternal life to them, who, by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality." On the other hand, he hath threatened "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul that doeth evil." In

such promises and threatenings all persons, whether old or young, are deeply concerned. If so, religion is of the highest importance. It is the *one thing needful.* As it reinstamps the divine image upon the soul, it constitutes the highest wisdom, and most substantial good, that man can possess on this side heaven. If, my young friends, you, in any good degree, realize the truth of what has been suggested, you are prepared to consider,

II. How necessary it is, and what encouragement is given you, to make religion the object of your first attention and care.

The reasonableness and importance of religion in general prove its claim to your regard; and your own personal concern in the effects it is to produce in time and eternity, teaches the necessity of early devoting yourselves to its study and practice. A wise and prudent person will attend to that first, and with the greatest diligence, which he believes to be most interesting and important to him. He is always esteemed unwise, who amuses himself with trifles, and neglects things of the greatest moment; on which, perhaps, his very life depends. This, as well as other considerations, ought to have weight in your minds. It should ever be a rule

with all men, to attend to that object first, from the neglect of which the greatest evil, or from the possession of which the highest good will result. Apply this rule to the case before you, and you will at once perceive that religion demands your first and principal care; and that, if you would act with prudence, in view of your mortal condition, it is necessary for you to devote yourselves to it without delay. Can any thing more deeply affect your happiness in this and in the world to come? The vain imagination of man gives importance to many other things; but his sober reason, his better judgment, places religion above every other concern, esteeming it the most momentous that ever employed the human mind. Indifference about it is folly; contempt of it, high presumption—desperate madness!

But, my young friends, early piety is proof of a sound mind, of a wise and understanding heart. It commands respect and confidence. Even the wicked are constrained to pay it some homage. If you consult your own consciences, you will find that you entertain a secret esteem and approbation of one of your young companions, who appears to be sober, pious and good. If you observe a change in one, who was des-

titute of religion and virtue, he at once rises in your estimation. Convinced that the change is real, you view him with a respect that he never before received from you. I appeal to your own hearts for the confirmation of these truths. Very few can resist the charms of religion and virtue in others so far, as not to feel a secret reverence for their character. Thoughtless youth, in this way, honour piety, while they refuse to let it adorn their own lives. They silently confess its moral beauty, and its necessity, while they take no care to possess it themselves. By your inward respect for the truly religious, you may see how necessary early piety is to your reputation, and to your own self-approbation. You would be thought wise and prudent; be pious and good, and you will be really so. If you are conscious that true religion in others commands your respect, you must perceive its importance, in this view, to yourselves. Make the experiment, and you will find that serious religion gives peace of mind, hope in God, trust in his providence, and submission to his will; that it enables you to bear the ills of life, refines the heart, exalts the soul, and prepares you for death, and a happy immortality beyond the grave.

Besides, your early piety and virtue may have great influence upon the conduct and happiness of your fellow beings. Those with whom you converse may be affected, and inclined to imitate "your good conversation in Christ." Moved by your example, they too may become the obedient servants of the living God, and ever live with him. It may even affect aged sinners, who are tottering over the grave with all their guilt and pollution, and bring them to a sense of their folly and danger. If not, it will have some influence on your young companions, and, under God, may save them from ruin. It will give credit to religion, and dignity to your character; check the progress of vice, redound to the divine glory, and to your own felicity. To all the true friends of religion, "who live godly in Christ Jesus," it will afford joy, while it quickens them in duty, and renders their service more delightful. They will offer thanks to God on your account, and encourage you to persevere unto the end.

Your religious parents, in a particular manner, will be comforted by your early piety. It will give them the highest satisfaction, to see their "children walking in the truth." Their pious concern, their fervent prayers for you,

their labours and care, will be answered and rewarded, if you, in the morning of life, dedicate yourselves unto God, and "walk before him with a perfect heart." Filial duty, the debt you owe to parental tenderness, ought to influence you to choose wisdom's ways, and to follow her paths. You would not wound their hearts, who have been ready to impart every good to you, and are daily pleading that God would give you spiritual wisdom, and sanctify you to himself. Hearken then to the voice of wisdom, and go in the way of understanding.

But, if it hath been your unhappy lot not to have religious parents, still you may be a blessing to them, and means of their salvation. We will not suppose them so totally lost to a sense of real excellency, as to be grieved and offended with your piety and moral purity. This would be extreme depravity. They see the wisdom of your choice, and feel that their own folly is reproved in a way that can scarcely fail to affect their hearts, and excite a better temper. But whatever effect your piety and holy examples may have on such parents, you may learn from them the danger of delay to make religion your concern and first business. They, probably, at your age formed some resolutions,

that they would attend to it before this period of their life. But, dreadful to think! they are yet thoughtless. Should you follow their example, and resolve to be religious some time hence, what right have you to expect you shall keep the resolution better than they? Their failure admonishes you to improve the present season. "Behold, now is the accepted time, the day of salvation: Therefore harden not your hearts."

We add, the propagation of religion, and its influence on future ages depends much, under God, on the rising generation. It is, in a great measure with you, who compose this generation, to say whether religion shall have credit and influence with those who shall come after you. God, we believe, can and will support his cause; but you may be the instruments of its defence, or advancement. This is a thought which merits attention. Others crowd upon the mind.

The longer you defer it, the more difficult will it be to engage in earnest in the duties of religion. Habitual indifference to sacred truths, to spiritual and divine things, soon leads to "hardness of heart, and blindness of mind." The obstacles to a devout and holy life will

increase with the years that are spent in vanity and wickedness. Accumulated guilt, and diminished sensibility, are the fruit of delay, and the symptoms of a person's being "dead in trespasses and sins." Fairly examined, every experiment that has been made will show the hazard of putting off the concerns of the soul and eternity to a supposed more convenient season; for it never arrives. Frequently do we hear persons lament, often in the language of deep despair, that they did not early attend to wisdom's voice, and give to God the dew of their youth; but never that they too soon became serious and good. Many a dying saint, after a long life of eminent piety, has received consolation from the reflection that he devoted himself to God and religion in his youth. "Lay up in store," my young friends, this "good foundation against the time to come."

As a farther inducement to it, consider your dependence on the divine assistance, and the intimation that it shall be withholden from them who quench and grieve the holy spirit. The declaration of the Most High is, "My spirit shall not always strive with man." Concerning you, if the present season is suffered to pass unimproved, God may say, as of a tribe in

Israel, "Ephraim is joined unto idols, let him alone." He who worketh in men to will and to do of his good pleasure, calls upon them to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, and gives every encouragement to their sincere endeavours to effect the all-important object. How kind, condescending, and gracious are his assurances! "I love them that love me, and those that seek me early shall find me. Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth liberally." Can you wish for greater encouragement to early piety? or for stronger proof that the dew of youth is an acceptable sacrifice to God? But, remember it is given to-day, if you will hear his voice; to-morrow the glad tidings may not meet your ear. If you now refuse to hear and obey, God may resist you as despisers of his goodness. Or, if you should obtain pardon, you may be denied the comforts of religion. In whatever light you contemplate the subject, the present is the best, and may be the only time allotted you for the great work of religion.

To impress this thought, let me remind you, that future time and opportunity are uncertain

to you, and beyond your control. If it could be supposed you would not become worse by delay, nor the work of religion more difficult for you; yet death may close the scene, and hurry your souls into the immediate presence of God! Many younger than you, perhaps your companions, have been suddenly arrested. This may be your lot. What foolish and dangerous presumption, then, to suspend your eternal hopes and happiness on the continuance of this uncertain life! to put off your highest concerns to a future period, which you may never see!

These are solemn and weighty considerations. More might be suggested; but I will only hint, that early piety will be attended with peculiar pleasure and satisfaction; that it will minister comfort in all your afflictions, be the solace of your declining years, arm you against the fears of death, and inspire you with a hope that will be "as an anchor to your souls," and "that will never make you ashamed."

IMPROVEMENT.

1. What hath been said about the reasonableness and importance of religion applies to all ages and classes of people. They who have not attended to it have the highest reason to confess

and lament their folly. The consequence of it is greatly to be dreaded. Has the world engrossed their thoughts, and been their only hope and portion? Wretched mortals! Their hope will soon perish, and their portion be with hypocrites and unbelievers. If there remain but a few hours of feeble life, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." But, if resolved to continue in his impiety, let him relinquish all hope of heaven, and reconcile himself to the thought of an everlasting separation from God, and all holy beings in the future state.

They who have made religion their choice, Christ their hope, and his gospel the rule of life, have "chosen that good part which shall never be taken away." Let them go on rejoicing, grow in grace, and endure unto the end; "for their labour shall not be in vain in the Lord." But,

2. The subject offers motives and encouragements to early piety; and is to be applied, in a more particular manner, to young people. The reasonableness and importance of religion

in general, and the necessity of making it an object of your first and most careful attention, you have heard stated. Suffer me, then, my friends, to ask if you do not feel a conviction, that it is your greatest interest, and will be your highest wisdom, immediately to devote yourselves to God in all the duties of piety and virtue? Appeal to your conscience, consult your inward feelings, your rational sense of things. These, I am persuaded, will decide in favour of the most speedy and sober attention to religion. Can it be, then, that you should find in your hearts any reluctance to enter upon the important work, on which your hopes for time and eternity depend? What are your objections? Do you fear you shall seek in vain? You can promise yourselves no greater success at a future period; and do you relinquish the idea of becoming holy and happy? Surely not. You intend to be, at some future time, what we would persuade you now to be, that is, sober minded, pious, virtuous, and good. Your apprehensions of want of success in applying yourselves to the study and practice of religion, has no effect on your determination what you will do in future. It cannot, therefore, be the reason of present neglect. Besides, God has in

his word given you all the encouragement that can be reasonably desired. He hath never said to any "Seek ye me in vain;" but hath declared that those who seek him early shall find him. "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." What greater encouragement to early piety can you wish? God commands you to "strive to enter in at the strait gate," and to learn heavenly wisdom; and can you expect to be holy and happy without any efforts or concern? This would be contrary to your own nature, and to the purposes of divine wisdom.

If, then, you must seek, or not enjoy the object, why not at the present time, while you possess vigour and activity, and are under advantages that will never be experienced in any other period of your life? Will any say in heart, "it is true, religion is reasonable and important; but I am too young to tie myself down to the rules of a holy life?" What, too young to serve the God that made you, to honour the Saviour that redeemed you, to act well, to be wise and happy! God ordaineth praise to himself out of the mouth of babes and sucklings; and will you think yourselves too young to glorify him? It is a reflection upon your own un-

derstanding. You cannot be too young to be virtuous and good; but you may soon become too old in sin to leave any reasonable hope that you will ever be delivered from its dominion and punishment.

Are any restrained from following the convictions of their conscience, from being pious and good, by an apprehension that they shall be the subjects of ridicule if they do not "follow the multitude to do evil?" Will any own that such an inferiour motive induces them to hazard their eternal interest? He must make a silly, a despicable figure, who is laughed out of his life, or estate; how much more so he that dares not be virtuous and religious, wise and good, lest fools should mock and ridicule him! This "fear of man bringeth a snare." It is astonishing that any should be under its controling influence. Where is their fear of God? Where their love to their own souls? "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom."

But, my youthful friends, do you feel that you cannot relinquish your pleasures and prospects in the world, to secure the future rewards of piety and virtue? Do you mentally say, that, when you shall have done with the pleasures and vanities of youth, you will attend to relig-

ion; but at present we must be excused? The import of this is, that you will devote yourselves to God and religion, when you can no longer be active and vigorous in your opposition to both. What folly! What presumption! What high and daring provocation! Can it be imagined that God will be pleased with the efforts of impaired reason, with the affections of a heart that renounces its love of sin only because it does not receive its wonted pleasure from it, with the services of an enfeebled body, or of decrepit age? Will you love him least, and serve him last, whom you ought to love most, and serve first? Is this a suitable return for the divine goodness, for redeeming love? Your consciences give the proper answer.

The loss of your relish for sinful indulgences, or the want of vigour to pursue the paths of vice, will not capacitate you for the duties and satisfactions of religion. Besides, it is an unreasonable prejudice against religion, if you think it will deprive you of any of the rational pleasures and comforts of this life. It only restrains you from hurtful lusts, from injurious practices. It teaches you how to use the world, and not abuse it; and in all things to honour

God, and preserve the purity of your own character.

Allowing all this to be true, some may feel that they are too much engaged in other concerns to attend to religion at present, and imagine they shall find a more convenient season. Yielding to such suggestions has proved the ruin of countless millions. Say not "to-morrow shall be as this day, and more abundant; for you know not what a day may bring forth." The present may be your last on earth; if it should not, you have no time to idle away; you are required to improve the whole term allotted you in the service of God and of your generation.

But take into view another consideration. Many of you have been, by the pious act of your parents, given up to God in baptism, and had the initiating seal of the covenant fixed upon you. Ought you not to ratify their act by personal consecration of yourselves to God, and keeping his commandments? Will you renounce your interest in covenant privileges, by refusing to comply with the terms of the covenant? Does your baptism lay you under no obligation to be pious and holy? As it gives you a title to some privileges, it must impose some duties. Your

names are enrolled under Christ, among the children of the covenant; and will you desert his cause, and deny your name as christians? Meditate upon this subject, and you will find that your souls are, in some sense, brought under a bond to make religion your personal concern, and to honour your Lord and Saviour, by observing all his institutions, by commemorating his death, according to his appointment.

If those who have not received the initiating seal of the covenant would be disciples of Christ, and belong to his visible kingdom, they must *believe and be baptized.* By refusing to submit to this ordinance, they deny Christ before men; and will he own them before his Father and the holy angels? He hath declared that he will not. Think, my friends, on your case, and learn what is your duty. I would not encourage an inconsiderate offer of yourselves as subjects of baptism; but if, upon serious reflection, you have a desire to come, I would say, "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest." May you have faith and a pure conscience; and may holy ordinances be your delight and consolation.

May I be indulged a few words to those, who have formed the tender conjugal connec-

tion, and thus become heads of families? What resolution more proper for you to take than this, that, "as for you and your houses, you will serve the Lord." Unless you do this in practice, you may be chargeable with the murder of your offspring, not of their bodies, but souls. How often have children been destroyed by the evil examples of parents! Heart-rending reflection! enough to fill the soul with the deepest anguish! Imagine yourselves arraigned at "the judgment seat of Christ," and that you hear your children testify, that you never dedicated them to God, never instructed them in the principles and duties of religion, never taught them to remember and honour their creator, but to their irregular propensities added the force of corrupt examples, and instilled into their tender minds the most licentious sentiments; and thus led into perdition those whom you were instruments of bringing into life! With what horrour we contemplate the deed, when a mother, to conceal her own shame, puts a speedy period to the life of her illegitimate offspring! But are they less cruel and unnatural, who destroy the souls of their children by wicked examples and instruction, or by the neglect of parental duty? Think what may be the effect

of your own want of piety and virtue upon them who are yet to be born.

On the other hand, your own piety, instruction, and holy examples may be means of bringing your children to glory, and causing them to rise up in the day of judgment, and call you blessed. How different the end! The means are as different. Pray do not give your unborn children, or those that are now objects of your affection, occasion to upbraid you with impiety, and with being the instruments of their ruin; but, as they may be given to you, strive to lead them to glory, honour, and immortality.

What has now been addressed to young heads of families is not to be construed into an intimation, that religion may be deferred to such period and connection in life. It should engage the first thoughts, the earliest attention. To early seeking, success is promised. But how, it may be asked, are we to seek? I answer, by breaking off your sins by righteousness, and your iniquities by turning to the Lord; by ceasing to do evil, and learning to do well; by setting the Lord always before your face; by the exercise of faith, repentance, and watchfulness; by humiliation, prayer, and supplication; by exerting all your powers to avoid sin, and

to honour God and keep his commandments, imploring his gracious assistance in every duty, and his acceptance through the mediator. "Pray without ceasing. Quench not the spirit." Be sober, and acquaint yourselves with the holy scriptures, "which are able to make you wise unto salvation, through faith in Christ Jesus." And may your hearts be established with grace. May the Lord be your God, and you a seed to serve him, that shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation; who shall come and declare his righteousness to them that are yet to be born, that, in the ages to come, his name may be exalted and adored on earth.

AMEN.

SERMON IV.

THE EXCELLENCY OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

PROVERBS xii. 26.

The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour.

An aspiring disposition is common to man. The youthful mind feels its influence; nor does it cease to operate in the decline of life. Few can be found, who have no desire to be esteemed more excellent than their neighbours. This disposition, though it often prompts to measures which defeat their own end, may be rendered subservient to the great purposes of religion and virtue. To effect this object there must be just conceptions of the means by which the human character may rise, not only to comparative, but to real excellence. Did men clearly understand in what this con-

sists, and follow the dictates of their reason, they would possess true worth and dignity; which always merit, and in general command, respect and esteem. Those principles in human nature, which distinguish man from every other creature on earth, induce him to seek with ardour whatever he perceives will give him superiour excellence, and gratify his strongest desires. To these principles, or to the known disposition and feelings of the heart, the text may be addressed in hope of success with youth, in whom we wish to excite a noble emulation to excel in every virtue.

Who are the most excellent among mankind the word of God informs us; and sober reason approves of its decision. The righteous have a fair title to the honourable distinction. By the righteous we understand persons of religion and moral goodness, who observe, with a pure conscience, the duties they owe to their Creator, to themselves, and to their fellow creatures. By their neighbour the opposite character, that is, the wicked, is intended. Righteousness, in the most extensive signification, includes the whole religious and moral duty of man. In this sense it dignifies the person in whom it is found, and gives him a vast superiority over

those who are destitute of it. Did men perceive how consonant the genuine spirit of religion is to the best feelings and principles of our nature, and how much it adds to their dignity and happiness, little need be said to recommend it to their choice and attention. But, in view of the actual state of religion in the world, we conclude mankind have fallen into gross mistakes about its nature and tendency, or conceived unreasonable prejudices against it; "since it is so natural to us to love that which is good, and delight in that which is amiable, when things are not misrepresented."

No one thing has been more grossly misrepresented, and its natural features more distorted, than genuine religion. Painted in false colours, presented to the mind under the most hideous forms, it is rendered disgusting in appearance, or corrupting in its influence upon those who embrace it as described. The enemies of true religion would persuade you to believe that it is fit only for weak and vulgar minds, for mean and sordid souls, that it proceeds from cowardly and superstitious fear, depresses the mind, and renders it incapable of high and aspiring thoughts. Thus viewed and contemplated, it is not strange that it excites aversion, that

many pour contempt upon it, and commend those, who are so free from what they call vulgar prejudices as to feel none of its restraints, but can, without any apparent checks of conscience, make it the subject of their unhallowed wit, and profane mockery.

With a view to correct, or guard against, the mistake of those who entertain such notions of true religion, who conceive it to be inconsistent with the dignity and happiness of human beings; and with a design to recommend it to all who would possess real excellence, we have chosen the words just read, as the theme of our discourse. They contain a simple proposition, which is easily comprehended. "The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour." That this truth may have a practical influence, in a particular manner upon the minds and hearts of youth, we shall attempt to describe some of the excellencies of the righteous. Though we should not do it to the best advantage, it is hoped so many of his qualities and interests may be represented, as will convince every reasonable person of the truth of the text, and excite a spirit of emulation.

If any honour be derived from birth and extraction, the righteous have the fairest title to it.

They are born of God, and acknowledged as his spiritual children. Religion gives that feature and complexion to their character, which prove their relation to the family in heaven. Holiness is a celestial seed. They in whom it is planted, and who bring forth its fruits, are entitled to the most honourable distinctions. They are "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ." These are not high-sounding, empty titles, invented to amuse and attract a giddy multitude; they convey an important sense, are applicable to all the righteous, and intimate their present worth and dignity, and their future inheritance. By holiness men become "partakers of the divine nature," and heirs of an immortal crown. The righteous bear the image, and possess, in a degree, the qualities of their heavenly parent. These give them a real excellence and splendour, never possessed by those destitute of religion, however elevated their stations, or loaded with worldly honours. Having imbibed the spirit of religion, the righteous person constantly acts under its influence, and aspires to the nearest resemblance of the adorable object of his love and reverence. He never, with design, behaves in a manner unworthy of his origin, inconsistent with his relation

to a pure and holy God, or with his own high destination. His qualities and endowments, if well understood, show that he is "born of the spirit," and that he is "going on to perfection." He is endued with that wisdom and understanding, which are the glory of man. Though he may not possess in the highest degree the wisdom of this world, which is little more than a cunning and subtilty to plan and execute schemes to gain temporal honour and advantage, without any restraint from religious and moral principle; yet he has the wisdom to discover and secure his true interest, everlasting honour and felicity. The man, who has this "understanding, is of an excellent spirit." His mind is enlarged to contemplate the noblest objects. His knowledge is infinitely more valuable than that of ancient or modern philosophers, who have either denied or been unacquainted with the true God. It is conversant with subjects of the most sublime nature, which have a tendency, not only to extend his conceptions and elevate his views, but to transform him into the same image. He contemplates that infinite Being, whose matchless perfections and works fill him with admiration, and call into exercise the best affections and powers of his

soul. The law of God, which he studies, understands, and observes, makes him wiser than the sages of any age, who have been strangers to pure religion. "It is deservedly accounted an excellent piece of knowledge," says Dr. Tillotson, "to understand the laws of the land, the customs of the country we live in; how much more to know the statutes of heaven, the eternal laws of righteousness, the will of the universal monarch, and the customs of that country where we hope to live forever?" Far indeed does this knowledge exceed that which is confined to earthly objects, or extends to the whole material system, and embraces as much of it, as any human intellect ever did. It is in its nature sublime, and it prepares a person to intermeddle with all wisdom, to attend with advantage to any science, for which his genius is adapted.

The knowledge of the righteous, in another view, is excellent and important. It is practical, enabling him to choose with wisdom, and act with discretion. He always prefers solid treasures to gilded trifles, eternal felicity in heaven to momentary pleasures on earth. "Happy is the man that findeth this wisdom, and the man that getteth this understanding. For the

merchandize of it is better than the merchandize of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies; and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her; and happy is every one that retaineth her." This happiness belongs only to the righteous.

But the greatness of his mind is equal to the sublimity of his knowledge. As this is conversant with the noblest objects, so his thoughts are elevated above the little things of this world. He would feel himself debased, and find the source of his highest pleasure corrupted, if his mind were much affected by the things that most affect many of the great and the vulgar. Raised in a good measure above the frowns and flatteries of the world, he directs his thoughts and affections to God, the fountain of felicity, desiring none in heaven or earth in comparison with him. His contemplation of heaven, and the glories of its eternal king, in whose presence he hopes, after passing from this mortal state,

forever to dwell, ennobles his mind, expands his soul, calms his passions, tranquillizes his inward feelings, and prepares him to preserve a dignified moderation and serenity in every vicissitude. "He will not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord."

This suggests another excellency of the righteous, nearly allied, indeed, to the one already mentioned, but worthy of distinct consideration. It is his magnanimity, his heroick courage, in action and suffering. Illustrious examples of the active and passive courage of the righteous are recorded in the eleventh of Hebrews. Nothing but conscious rectitude and trust in God could have sustained the sufferers, and imparted such dignity to them in their trying circumstances. The fortitude, patience, unshaken resolution, and firmness, of christians, under persecution and torture, have often astonished, sometimes confounded, their enemies.

The righteous is above that meanness of spirit, which induces some, through fear of disgrace, of pain, or of the loss of popular favour, to condescend to practices which their minds cannot justify. He is prepared to hazard every thing, rather than the peace of his conscience, and the approbation of his God; to do and suf-

fer any thing, rather than give up his integrity. Surrounded with the greatest imaginable dangers, exposed to the severest trials, he has a resource in himself, and is not greatly moved. "The righteous is bold as a lion." No terrours dismay his heart; for he feels that God is his friend, and the rock of his safety.

As the natural effect of this courage, this magnanimity, he enjoys the most perfect freedom. They who are of a contrary description, an opposite character, are enslaved by their lusts, passions, and appetites; and by the senseless ceremonies and customs of the world. With such persons fashion is the supreme law, as well in respect to their mode of thinking and speaking, and their treatment of religious and moral subjects, as in regard to outward appearance. When fashionable, they pay some external homage to the institutions of religion; but, let the fashion change, and, though they may feel no real prejudice against religion and its sacred rites, they seldom honour them by their profession and personal attendance. Custom controls the better feelings of the heart, the wiser suggestions of conscience, and keeps them from the house and ordinances of divine worship. But the righteous man feels a digni-

fied freedom from such bondage, a liberty to think and act like a rational creature, accountable to his Creator. He knows no restraint, but what arises from the law of the Lord, which converts the soul, and from the testimonies of the Lord, which make wise the simple. These, so far as their influence extends, release him from slavery to his lusts and passions, or to the fashions and customs which keep many from their duty, or draw them into the paths of vice.

The servant of sin, hurried into practices that are injurious, and which conscience condemns, is subject to the meanest slavery. "While such promise liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption; for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought into bondage." Delivered from such wretched servitude, such disgraceful fetters, the righteous is become "the Lord's free man." Religion moderates the blind passions, corrects irregular affections, restrains unhallowed desires, gives to the soul the enjoyment of itself, makes it master of its own thoughts, and free to choose whatever is right.

To these excellencies we add a meek, charitable, and benign temper of mind. He has not the narrowness of spirit to confine his views to

his own private interest; nor the vanity to think himself more deserving than all others of the smiles of heaven, and the confidence of his fellowmen. He does not think of himself more highly than he ought to think, condescends to men of low degree, and extends his kindness to all whom he can comfort or assist. "He is gracious, and full of compassion; he showeth favour and lendeth." To "do good and communicate" is his delight. Nor are his charity and its effects confined to the little circle of his own family and connexions, or to those of his own religious sentiments, to the exclusion of others; but extended to every proper object, while he has the highest complacency in those he believes to possess true piety and virtue. Of this he does not form his judgment so much from their opinions, as from that holy life and conversation, which indicate purity and sincerity of heart. Good men, of whatever communion, share in his affection and esteem. Towards the children of sorrow and distress he cherishes a tender, generous sympathy; but does not, like the pharisees of old, do alms to be seen of men. Conscious that he hath done his duty, and relieved a fellow creature, he is satisfied, though even the object of his charity

know not whence the favour proceeded. If the giver be known, the gift is communicated in such a manner, as to free the receiver from every kind of mortification, and almost persuade him to believe, that, in accepting it, he hath conferred a favour on the donor; or, at least, to feel as great obligation for the manner of giving, as for the gift itself.

These excellencies place the righteous above his neighbour; they always merit esteem and confidence.

Temperance and purity form another part of this character. "He hath risen above the vaporous sphere of sensual pleasure, which darkeneth and debaseth his mind, which sullies its lustre, and abates its native vigour; while profane persons, wallowing in their lusts, do sink themselves below the condition of men."

This feature, rendered more observable by the contrast every hour presented, stamps upon the righteous marks of worth and dignity. The excellence of these virtues is seen in the contrast with their opposite vices, which degrade the human character more than almost any thing else that can be named. "One of the most shameful and miserable spectacles in the world is, to see a man born to the use of reason,

and perhaps to an eminent fortune, drink away his religion, his reason, his sense; and so expose himself to the pity of wise men, the contempt of his own servants, the derision of his children, and fools, to every danger, and every snare." Nearly allied to this degrading but common vice, is that impurity of conversation and conduct, in which some appear to take pride. It would be difficult for a person of correct moral taste and discernment to decide whether this impure communication, or habits of intemperance, be most offensive; they are in general found together in the same persons; but either must be extremely disgusting to those whose minds are not lost to all sense of the dignity of rational beings. Such habits the righteous man never allows. He "is temperate in all things," gives evidence of the goodness of his heart in the purity of his life, and by possessing his mental and bodily powers "in sanctification and honour." Free from pride and arrogance, the properties of base and silly minds, or a giddiness incident to those who are raised, on a sudden, to an unaccustomed height, and void of criminal ambition, he is courteous to all, and content with the station providence allots him, with obtaining honour and promotion only by

meriting them, and acquiesces in that obscurity and private condition from which he cannot rise without the sacrifice of his integrity.

Let me add, what gives peculiar lustre to the virtues of the righteous, he is a humble follower of the meek and lowly Jesus, copying after the moral perfections of the Saviour of the world. Taking him for a pattern, and his gospel for the rule of his affections and actions, he presses forward to the highest attainments in every thing praise worthy. This being the object of it, his ambition is not to be suppressed, but cherished, and is rendered subservient to the noblest purposes. As pure religion and moral rectitude form his general character, and give him superiour worth, he is ambitious to excel, to "go on to perfection" in a holy life. In this view he can never be too aspiring; for, in proportion as he rises above his irreligious neighbour, he will be meek and humble, charitable and beneficent, kind and forgiving, just and equitable, sober and temperate. The object of his ambition, the point to which he aspires with holy ardour, is not to gain authority over his fellow beings, or to reduce their character and situation to infamy and dependence; but to become an eminent disciple of Christ,

and to possess and exhibit the spirit of his religion. He despises none below, nor envies any above him in moral and religious attainments; the efforts of the one he will aid, in the progress of the other rejoice; while he strives "so to run, as to obtain the prize," to be so faithful over a few things, that he may be made ruler over many things, and enter into the joys of his Lord.

The superiour excellence of such a character, without drawing the picture of its opposite, which is daily presented in part, if not at full length, none can be so blind as not to see, and few so corrupt as not to acknowledge. It is perceived, and often confessed, by men of the contrary description, when they have no disposition, or intention, to honour goodness as such, or to bear testimony in its favour. The infidel, the wicked and profligate, who make religion a subject of ridicule, and affect to have the highest confidence in those that have none, when brought to the near view of death, a situation that rouses their attention, and allays their passions and prejudices, if desirous to find one with whom they can trust their private concerns, and those of their family, will look for him, not among their own party, but among

those esteemed righteous. Thus they are constrained, notwithstanding the current of their conduct and conversation has been against it, implicitly to acknowledge that in heart they believe the righteous to be more excellent than his neighbour, the man of religion more worthy of confidence than one destitute of it, the christian a better friend than the infidel. This secret veneration for piety and virtue is in general felt, and, without their intending it, often discovered by those who have no pretensions to either. If, then, we have the testimony of enemies in favour of the righteous, given under circumstances that admit no doubt of its proceeding from the conviction of their minds, the conclusion is fair, that he is in reality, and in the estimation of mankind, more excellent than his neighbour.

But the inconsiderate are often dazzled and deceived by appearances, and led to attach ideas of respectability to circumstances that have no connection with real worth and goodness. This is more common with the young and inexperienced, than with those who have had opportunity to notice, and examine what passes in the world, and to learn how deceptive are the things after which many eagerly grasp. Every trait in

the human character, which is independent of religious and moral principles and habits, will be found, on a fair trial, to be comparatively mean and unworthy of esteem. The aspiring mind, in order to obtain its wishes, and possess real and conscious dignity and excellence, must begin with the fear of the Lord, and devote its best faculties to religion and virtue. Here let a youth fix his attention; to this point let him direct the increasing energies of his mind, and he cannot fail to become truly worthy of esteem; and may expect to extort approbation from those who affect to condemn his sobriety, temperance, purity, and piety.

If these observations are just, how must we view that spirit which induces men to treat religion with contempt, or neglect, as a matter of indifference, a thing in which they have no personal interest or concern; and to scoff at it, and, if possible, destroy its influence? It is a spirit of rebellion against God, and of hostility against the improvement and happiness of man. Actuated by whatever motives in their attempts to reason, or laugh, religion out of countenance, they must change the nature of things before they can render its possessor as unworthy as themselves, and blind the understanding of men

before they can prevent their perceiving the difference of character.

Would you, my young friends, rise to dignity and true worth here, and to "glory, honour, and immortality," in the future state; you must not form your resolutions and rules of life after the examples of free thinkers, or of more free actors in scenes of folly and wickedness; but according to that perfect standard, which exposes their enormity, viz. the word of God, and the example of Christ; and of those christians who have imitated him, and shone as lights in the world; whose faith, piety, virtue, magnanimity, constancy, and universal goodness have drawn honourable confessions even from the mouth of wickedness itself, and commanded the secret veneration of the most profligate.

Youth is the period during which the character of the future man is, in a great measure, to be formed.—It is the time to plant and cherish the seed that is to bring forth the fruits of righteousness in advanced age. But, my friends, it is a dangerous period. Untaught by experience, possessing ardent minds, strong passions, lively imaginations, ambitious feelings, and aspiring dispositions, most of you enter upon the

theatre of the world. Unapprized of the deceptions to which you are exposed, you are liable to be captivated by the illusions of fancy, and, while eagerly grasping after the mere shadow of bliss, to lose the substance. Objects of sense arrest your attention, and prospects of enjoyment, never to be realized in this imperfect state, may occupy your thoughts, inflame desire, and chain you to pursuits unworthy your rational nature, and inconsistent with the hope of future perfection in blessedness. Before they apprehend the danger, the young are, many times, drawn into inextricable difficulties, before they have learnt what constitutes the dignity and happiness of man. They become indifferent to the honour of virtuous deeds, and to the shame of those which degrade their nature, and blast all the hopes to which they were born.

Thus exposed, and beset with temptations on every side, the best office which parental affection can dictate, or the experience of years enable us to perform, is, to invite, and if possible engage, your early and serious attention to the things which alone can save you from disappointment, render you amiable and excellent, and gratify every reasonable desire. Religion

and virtue, in principle and practice, will do all this. By religion I do not mean any particular forms of worship, nor that gloomy sadness, superstition, or enthusiasm, which some call by the name; but a reverential fear and love of God, conscientious regard to his law, lively faith in Christ, respect to the sacred institutions, rules, and precepts of his gospel, and an habitual disposition of heart to abound in all the fruits of righteousness. Let your minds be established in these leading principles of universal goodness, applying them to every relative duty; and let your whole temper and conduct be formed upon this plan, and you will possess a real excellence, and merit an esteem, which you can neither gain nor deserve in any other way. Let this be your object, this your course, this the eminence to which you strive to rise, and we will rejoice to observe in you a high spirit of emulation. Determined on this method to become great, honourable, and good, you can never cherish too aspiring a disposition. You may indulge a holy ambition to reach distinguished attainments, and resolve that you will not be retarded in your progress by the less vigorous and active, nor turned from the road of honour and felicity by an opposing multitude,

whatever be their pretensions to superiour wisdom, or their claims to your deference. The elevation, or honour, that cannot be gained and enjoyed without a sacrifice of religious and moral principle and duty, you will ever consider below your dignity, and fit for those only who have the meanness to accept it on such base terms. Adopt and keep this resolution of the psalmist, "I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments;" and, like that of the righteous, may your path shine brighter and brighter, as the dawning light, unto the perfect day.

SERMON V.

WARNING AGAINST THE ENTICEMENT OF SINNERS.

PROVERBS i. 10.

My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.

THIS is the monitory language of parental tenderness and solicitude. Every pious father will be ready to adopt it, and every dutiful child to listen to the instruction. With equal affection and concern the virtuous and religious parent would guard both sons and daughters against the snares and enticements of the wicked. What he says unto one, he says unto all, *watch*, and consent not unto the enticement of sinners.

This subject is chosen for the benefit of youth. May this class seriously attend, while

in the discussion of it we offer several things to their consideration. The speaker gives to all the advice he devoutly wishes his own children to follow. With feelings of tender solicitude, known only to the heart of a parent, he is ready to say, and, in saying it, to drop the affectionate tear, and to raise to God the fervent prayer for his blessing, "My son," my daughter, "if sinners entice thee, consent thou not;" and, following the wise king of Israel, to add, "If they say, come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause, let us swallow them up alive as the grave, and whole as those that go down into the pit; we shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil; cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse. My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path; for their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood."

But not against crimes of such a malignant and atrocious nature only, but against every kind of vice and wickedness, to which you may be enticed by sinners, would he wish to guard and fortify your youthful minds. To effect the object, it will be necessary to point out the danger, and the means of escape, and, if possi-

ble, my young friends, to interest your feelings in the subject. It highly concerns you to have your minds and hearts engaged upon it.

Ushered into being, and unapprized of what is before you, it is the natural dictate of the benevolent heart to suggest, that you will be exposed to numerous temptations, and may have many parts assigned you in the drama of human life; and, that you may be prepared to meet these, to offer the best lessons drawn from experience, and the oracles of God.

Man has but few inherent principles, by which to determine and govern his moral conduct. He is influenced by motives, and soon becomes, in a great measure, the creature of habit; and it is of the highest importance that the purest should govern and characterize his youth. He has, indeed, a native power of judging between truth and falsehood, right and wrong; and his discernment of the one, or the other, is always accompanied with an inward approbation, or disapprobation. Although, informing the mind and fixing its sentiments, much depends on education, experience, and numerous adventitious circumstances; yet the native power of perception and judgment, called common sense, and deemed the principal char-

acteristick of rationality, must be acknowledged. By this power the mind is enabled to discover the principles of religion and moral obligation, and, when the matter is fairly proposed, to determine what is the duty of a rational creature. But, notwithstanding this ability to distinguish truth from falsehood, right from wrong, and our secret approbation of the one, and disapprobation of the other, we often disregard the decisions of common sense, are drawn from the right, and hurried into the opposite course. From our first entrance into life till we arrive at its utmost boundary, we are surrounded with objects of sense, which allure thousands from the path that reason and religion pronounce the most safe and happy.

Temptations assail us from every quarter; but none, perhaps, are more irresistible than those which arise from the examples and enticements of sinners. These have a baneful effect upon the youthful mind. Next to example, good or bad, the persuasion of those whose favour is desired will influence the judgment and conduct of mankind. According to the nature of the example, and to the object proposed, mankind may be drawn to the side of virtue, or vice. But evil examples and the enticement of

sinners, being most correspondent to the propensities of human nature, are by no means least influential in forming the characters and habits of men. The young are most liable to be corrupted. Youth has its peculiar temptations, and in general receives the deepest impressions from external objects, and from the companions with which it is associated. At this period habits of virtue, or vice, are commonly formed, and example and persuasion have the greatest effect. When any habit has become fixed, there seems to be a disposition to resist every thing designed to change, or correct it. There is a sort of pride in adhering to the first choice, and in refusing to re-examine the subject. It is therefore of very great importance that young persons should be guarded and cautioned against the examples and enticements of the wicked, lest they be seduced into the paths of vice and folly, live in disgrace, die in despair, and sink into endless darkness and misery. The text is a caution, given by a father to his son. The mode of expression is tender and affectionate. By a father it is now addressed to his own children, and to every youth who may hear the discourse, which he hopes will appear plain and instructive. In treating upon

the subject a number of leading thoughts will present themselves, and demand, even at the hazard of being carried to an unpopular length, a distinct consideration.

The first thing to be considered is the fact that sinners entice others. This is established by the testimony of holy writ, and verified by daily observation. The author of the words under consideration was too well acquainted with human nature, in its various appearances, not to be well apprized what part sinners will act, and what the danger resulting from their examples and solicitations. Nor can any youth of common observation and reflection fail of noticing the fact, though he may not have perceived the particular danger to which himself and others have been, and constantly are, exposed. Review, my young friends, almost ever so short a period of your life, and you will find that, in your intercourse with the world, you have been beset with the enticements of sinners, and urged to comply with their wishes, to adopt their notions and practices. Your own experience, therefore, justifies the intimations of God's holy word, and, we fondly hope, prepares you to receive the admonition not to yield to their power of persuasion, to their arts of se-

duction. The fact granted, which never can be denied with any appearance of truth and reason, it will be interesting to inquire,

In the next place, secondly, to what sinners would entice you, and into some of the motives of their conduct. To suppose they will persuade you to be virtuous and good, and thus secure a different and better character than their own, is unnatural, absurd, and contrary to universal experience. Their object, or, at least, the general tenor of their conduct and conversation, is to engage others to be their companions in wickedness, to draw them into the vices to which they themselves are addicted. As if by increasing the number of transgressors, and extending the dominion of sin and misery, their own guilt will be diminished, to use a pertinent observation of our Lord, "they compass sea and land to make one proselyte;" and often are not content until they have made him "two fold more a child of hell than themselves." Like the grand adversary of our race, they endeavour to corrupt the minds and destroy the virtue of those around them, and thus poison the only pure source of happiness. No means are left untried to gain their point, to entice others to silence the voice of conscience, and to

free themselves from every idea of religious and moral obligation, so far, at least, as not to hesitate about joining them in whatever course they are disposed to pursue. Some, having made greater advances in wickedness and impiety, carry this design farther than others; but every step tends to the highest presumption, folly, and criminality, to induce men to cast off all fear of God, to submit to no restraint, but to give the reins to every unruly passion. In faithful allegiance to their master, sinners strive to establish his kingdom, and extend his empire, by increasing the number of his subjects, and persuading them to prove by their works their loyalty to the prince of darkness.

But what can be their motives? This is a question not hard to solve. Their motives are as base as their conduct is wicked. It will be conceded, that very few choose sin for its own sake, or for its ultimate consequences. They propose to themselves some present pleasure and advantage, or the removal of some uneasiness which they experience. This will account for the general practice of sinners in enticing others to the ways of wickedness. The superiour excellence of the virtuous and holy, excites a continual uneasiness in their own bo-

soms; and this becomes a powerful motive to destroy, if possible, the ground of the other's superiority, and reduce his character to a level with their own. Religion and virtue, they very well know, exalt the human character, and command the veneration and esteem of those who want the resolution to cherish any principle and habit of goodness. Their conscious inferiority to the virtuous and good impels the vicious, not to change their own temper and manners, but to bring the others to their base standard. Though so attached to the pleasures of sin, and confirmed in the habits of it, that they will not relinquish them for the purer and nobler enjoyments of virtue and piety; yet they are not satisfied with their own choice, situation and prospects. Far from feeling that they have acted with more wisdom, and secured higher degrees of honour and felicity, than they who have chosen to observe the principles of religion and moral rectitude, they envy their happiness, while they refuse to make a single effort to rise to the same condition and character. Can a baser motive ever influence the human mind? Detestable as it is, its influence is not to be doubted.

Though men debase themselves by the meanest vices, and abandon themselves to the grossest wickedness; yet they are unwilling to sink in the esteem of their fellow men, and especially of the more virtuous and reputable part of society. The idea excites painful emotions. But they know that, in proportion as virtue is honoured, vice is disgraced. Our good opinion of others is founded, not so much on their absolute, as on their comparative worth and excellence. Sinners, the viler sort in particular, making the comparison, at once perceive that they are not entitled to equal respect with their more virtuous neighbours, and, averse to a reformation, find it necessary to entice others into the vices that stamp their own character, that they may hold equality with them. Hence arises that levelling disposition so prevalent among the most vicious part of mankind, as much in respect to virtue and character, as to property and power. The wicked, whose evil habits have brought them into poverty and contempt, discover a strong propensity to reduce those of eminent wisdom and goodness to their own base standard, rather than to rise by an imitation of their examples. Envy, the meanest and worst of human passions, rankles in

their breast, and hurries them into conduct as detestable, as the motive by which they are actuated. Though they feel a secret veneration for the pious and good, they sicken at the praise which such characters receive. The honours of virtue the most profligate desire; but will not secure them by cherishing its principles, and exhibiting its fruits. Hence arises the disposition to hypocrisy, to exhibit an appearance of religion and moral rectitude, and to make it pass for the reality.

Envy is an uneasy and sordid passion, which seeks relief in the destruction, or injury, of its object. But how despicable the wretch, who, wishing to receive the honour and respect of his pious and virtuous neighbour, instead of imitating him, and thus rising to worth, is content with bringing him down to his own level! How mean the spirit, which, having no desire, or design, to acquire a good reputation, seeks to destroy the good name and real worth of another by enticing him into vice and folly! How sordid the soul, that, instead of aspiring to any thing noble and good in principle and practice, is ambitious to extend the empire of sin and depravity! Such meanness, such sordid dispositions, may be attributed to all who, with de-

sign, entice others from virtue and religion, to vice and impiety. Conscious inferiority, instead of exciting a generous emulation, too often generates, or calls into action, those corroding passions, which banish the benevolent affections of the heart, destroy every virtuous sentiment of the mind, and furnish motives to entice and degrade the innocent.

But other motives operate. Wicked purposes are not, at all times, to be accomplished without the aid of sinful companions. Sinners, therefore, entice others to join hand in hand, that they may with greater ease effect their object. Many species of wickedness cannot be perpetrated by a solitary agent; and some that may be are not so alluring and gratifying without, as with a number of companions. It would not be difficult to adduce examples; but it is unnecessary; your own minds will suggest a sufficient number.

Another circumstance merits attention. Mankind, when engaged in scenes of iniquity, do not enjoy self-approbation, but seek a kind of justification in the consent of others to the same, or similar practices. We often hear persons attempt to vindicate, or palliate, their own conduct, by comparing it with that of others,

than which it seldom fails to appear, in their view, less heinous. A desire to pacify their own minds, free themselves from all restraint, and justify themselves to the multitude, becomes a secret but powerful motive to entice others, not yet lost to virtue, into the same vices that have marked their own character. A course opposite to their own, and manifestly pure and good, is a tacit but pointed reproof, and will excite some unpleasant reflections, a consciousness of their own guilt. Determined sinners, therefore, feel an interest in drawing others into their own habits and society, that they may relieve their own minds, diminish that worth of others, and destroy the foundation of that esteem, which they are not content they should possess.

These are some of the probable motives of the sinner's conduct in enticing others; and they are as base, as their practice is detestable. Convinced of this, you will be prepared to attend,

Thirdly, To their methods of enticing others.

To point out all the ways and means sinners adopt to corrupt the minds of the virtuous, to lead youth astray from God and duty, and to draw them into degrading and destructive sen-

timents and habits, is more than we can undertake at present. But we shall notice some of the most common.

1. Their examples have a surprising influence. Man is an imitative creature, prone to copy what he observes in those with whom he is conversant. With youth this method is most successful; though it has an effect at every period of life. The examples that are set before us become, in a greater or less degree, the directory of our conduct, and often give a turn to our sentiments, mode of thinking, and moral feelings. Those of the wicked are an enticement to the virtuous. They may, at first, shock a person of real virtue, and be less likely to have an ill effect upon one of habitual piety and rectitude. But such a person is not wholly free from danger. He may be insensibly influenced by evil examples, when they have become familiar, and drawn into actions his sober reason condemns; such as he once abhorred, and such as cannot fail to be a source of future regret. Observation evinces the humbling truth, that persons of fair character, of sober life and conversation, whose consciences never reproached them with any flagrant wickedness,

have been drawn by evil examples into base and unworthy deeds. If such be their influence, in any instance, upon those who have formed sentiments and habits of virtue, we may expect they will have a greater effect on those who are undetermined what course to pursue, who have had but little experience, and whose habits are not fixed. It is, therefore, of great importance, my young friends, that you should be apprized of your danger, and cautioned against that imitation of the wicked, which will destroy your best hopes, and give pain to the hearts of pious parents. But,

2. Not content with what they can effect by example, sinners use every art of persuasion in their power to draw others over to their party. They try arguments, plausible in appearance, to gain their point; and, when neither persuasion, nor argument, avails according to their wishes, they affect to despise those with whom they are unsuccessful, but whose character they secretly revere. A specimen of their reasoning will be given. When they would encourage an unbounded indulgence of the passions and propensities of human nature, they allege, "that the author of our being hath interwoven in our constitution those passions and

affections, appetites and desires, which religion and moral maxims require us to restrain ; and that it can never be the intention and will of so benevolent a creator, that his creatures should not gratify, but mortify their natural passions and desires. The supposition," say they, " is highly derogatory to the divine character. What, will you pretend to the least reverence and love for the Deity, when you maintain that he hath planted certain passions, affections, and desires in your nature, which give pain, unless they are gratified, and yet forbid their indulgence ? Absurd notion," say they ; " their design is by the gratification of them to increase our happiness. You ought, then, to express your gratitude to the Creator by acting in conformity to his wise and benevolent design, as it appears in your make and constitution ; otherwise you manifest unreasonable suspicions of his wisdom and goodness." Thus sinners, devoted to pleasure and criminal indulgence, silence their own conscience, and endeavour to entice others into the paths of vice. In favour of some species of iniquity they, by a strange abuse of it, allege scripture authority. By such methods they delude the simple, and ensnare the unwary. Their arguments for the unre-

strained indulgence of our natural passions, appetites, and propensities, drawn from whatever source, and however plausible in appearance, are perfectly sophistical and futile. Their falsity scarcely needs to be suggested to persons of reflection and judgment; nor does it come within my design, in a particular manner to expose them. But let it be remarked, that, admitting our happiness to have been the chief object of the Creator in the structure of our bodies and minds, and in all he hath done for us, it will not follow that it must consist in an unbounded indulgence and gratification of the animal passions and appetites. These, we allow, were designed to be means of preservation and pleasure; but, to answer their design, they must be under due regulation. They are not the noblest part of the human constitution, never intended to be the supreme law and rule of action, but to be in strict subordination to the superiour powers of the mind, to the rational faculties of the soul. If not under the control of reason, but gain ascendency over the intellectual powers, mental enjoyment and satisfaction, in their nature infinitely superiour to the highest pleasures of sense, can never be realized. In proportion as passion, in opposition to reason,

influences and directs our choice and conduct, we become restless and miserable. Every argument, therefore, for the unrestrained indulgence of the passions, appetites, and propensities of our nature, strikes at the foundation of rational happiness, and of the dignity of man; and may be concluded false and deceptive, though you should not be able, at first thought, to detect the fallacy. But,

3. Another method practised by sinners is, to dress vice in the most alluring colours, to represent it under a different character, give it a fascinating appearance, and exhibit all the evidence they can of their sincerity and satisfaction in their choice. Of religion and strict virtue they draw the most gloomy picture, and represent those who conscientiously adhere to the principles and rules they prescribe, as abject slaves, fit companions only for such as have no relish for the social enjoyments of life, or are so void of sensibility and taste, as to be incapable of any other than a negative kind of happiness. When the sinner has finished his dreary portrait of virtue and religion, and represented their votaries as superstitious idolaters, paying adoration to a God that cannot save them from the distress of religious melancholy, and who has not

the benevolence to free them from the pain of self-denial, or to reward them for it; then he rears the stately image of his god pleasure, and decorates it with every ornament imagination can invent. "This," says he, (and youth are apt to believe him) "is the only object worthy of your attention. This lays no painful restraint, is liberal to all, and impartial in the distribution of happiness." The better to gain proselytes, the devotees to this god put on the air of satisfaction and self-approbation, as much as possible, that observers may entertain no suspicion of their disappointment. But, with all their art and contrivance to conceal their real state, they seldom appear, when attentively watched, to possess that calmness and serenity, which are the natural offspring of conscious integrity, faith, purity, and virtue. Their pleasures are rapturous, their joys transporting, their delight exquisite, and their happiness exalted; and, if we may believe as they would have us, they know no alloy but what arises from the stupidity of others, who, as they pretend, are deprived by their scruples of conscience of all relish for true enjoyment. As a still greater inducement to yield to their solicitations, they endeavour to

persuade you, that the course they recommend leads to the certain possession of riches. "Come with us," say they, "and we shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil." These methods being tried, and proving ineffectual, sinners then, as we observe,

4. Affect to despise, and treat with ridicule, those who resist the temptation, and preserve their integrity. They charge them with cowardice, want of spirit and resolution to be happy; with credulity and superstition; with being restrained from true enjoyment by some imaginary prohibition of the Creator, or by some preacher whose living depends on his art in representing the innocent pleasures of life as destructive to the soul. This has proved a successful method. Ridicule and affected contempt have proved powerful weapons against the cause of religion and virtue. They have a very commanding influence upon the youthful mind and heart, unless early fixed in sentiments and habits of piety and goodness. Sinners understand the use and effect of these weapons, and often ply them with great dexterity. Though conscious of their own inferiority to the truly virtuous, they make these the subjects of ridicule, affect to despise them, to avoid their

society, and to treat them as a degraded order of human beings, who are unworthy to be companions of men of honour, whose generous souls have a true relish for manly pleasures; by which they often intend criminal indulgences, dissipation, and dissoluteness of morals and manners.

Against these and every other method of enticement to sin, you are exhorted and entreated, my young friends, to be on your guard. You are constantly exposed, and can never be too vigilant. "Watch, and pray, lest you enter into temptation," and fall by evil devices. May integrity ever guide and preserve you, the blessing of heaven rest upon you, and the power of divine grace enable you to stand perfect and complete in the whole will of God.

SERMON V.

SECOND PART.

WARNING AGAINST THE ENTICEMENT OF SINNERS.

PROVERBS i. 10.

My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.

In pursuing the subject we shall, in the next place,

Fourthly, Offer to your consideration a general rule of judging the character of those who entice you.

It is not uncommon for the impious and vile to exhibit an appearance of sanctity, and pretend to eminent degrees of piety and virtue. They dress themselves "in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves." By this artifice the young, who are unable to penetrate the secret purposes of their hearts, and are unsus-

picious of an evil design, are often deceived. By concealing their views, and professing love and zeal for religion and virtue, the wicked are often most successful in drawing others over to their party. If they can raise in the minds of those, with whom they are conversant, a belief that they are religious, they gain their confidence, and possess an influence over them. Under this character the virtuous pay them deference; and what they justify and practise, is concluded to be innocent and commendable, without comparing it with any established principles of morality. Many are betrayed because they do not examine the real character of those who would entice them to particular practices. Supposing it to be good, they conclude their conduct cannot be bad; whereas they ought to learn from the quality of the fruit what is the nature of the tree.

Though men may have the art and address to persuade us that they are good, we ought not to suffer them to determine what is right for us to do, without consulting our own conscience. This we are to respect and obey, as God's vicegerent in the human soul. No sentiment is to be entertained, or action performed, which, upon a fair examination, this does not approve.

If any urge you to that which, upon a clear and full statement of the case, your own conscience disallows, you have reason to entertain suspicions of his goodness, however high he may have stood in your estimation.

It is indeed possible, that a person of a pure and honest mind may encourage that which you conceive to be wrong; and therefore you ought not too hastily to conclude against any one who differs from you as to the fitness of some actions. But still your own conscience, not his, must be your guide. When he entices you to any thing notoriously and confessedly evil, his goodness, to say the least, must be very doubtful. By consulting your own conscience, you can determine for yourselves what is right, and what is wrong. When that forbids a compliance with any solicitation, instead of yielding to the judgment, or disposition, of another, and endeavouring to reconcile your mind to that which it perceives to be wrong, you should presume that he is in an errour, or that his motives are not so pure as you may have conceived. You never can be justified in consenting to a thing you apprehend to be wrong, because you are enticed by those, of whom you have entertained a fa-

vourable opinion. You are to relinquish this opinion, rather than to violate conscience; for it is more common for persons to be hypocritical, than for a man's conscience to judge that to be sinful, which is not so. Care must be taken to inform the mind, to become acquainted with the rules of duty God hath given. By the light of his word we are to judge of the fitness of any course of conduct. If by this, conscience determine that to be evil and wicked, to which a man entices you, there is reason to conclude, unless you have ground to suspect an errour in his judgment, that his heart is not right, whatever you once thought of his character. But we go upon the supposition that conscience is impartially attended to, as the judge of right and wrong, that the mind is not under a strong bias, that it is not interested, or inclined, to pervert the decisions of conscience; but disposed to understand the truth. In this case, from the very things to which they entice you, the real character of your fellow beings is, in a great measure to be determined.

There are exceptions to this general rule. You may be serious and honest, but superstitious; and others may aim to free you from such an infirmity; but you, not aware of your

own superstitious notions, may feel yourselves bound to retain them; and from this circumstance form a wrong estimate of the character of those that would persuade you to renounce them. On the other hand, they who would persuade you to any thing you believe wrong, may not be corrupt in heart, but erroneous in judgment. But persons of sober reflection will commonly discover when this is the case, and guard against false and uncharitable conclusions. These are exceptions; but they do not destroy the general rule of judging the characters of mankind. By it you may discover right and wrong, and the temper and disposition of those who entice you to evil; and therefore it can be scarcely a palliation of your fault, to say you consented, because, from your good opinion of your enticers, you had no apprehension of being led into vice and folly.

The wicked may persuade you to some actions which are materially good, and which are so in a moral sense, if performed from right motives. Nor ought you any more to refrain from a good action, because a supposed bad man recommends it, than to perform an evil one, because it is sanctioned by a person you esteem virtuous. When the latter entices you

to any thing confessedly wrong, he forfeits his character, and ought to lose his influence. "By their fruit ye shall know them." If this be corrupt, it is no breach of charity to conclude it proceeds from a corrupt tree. — High pretenders to goodness are not to be credited on the authority of their own word; but are to be known by their works. Judging by this rule, it is many times found that they deserve to be ranked with the vilest sinners, because they have enticed others into the grossest wickedness. Their apparent sanctity and zeal in religion have increased their influence, and proved means of enticing the unsuspicious into dishonourable and destructive courses. Be on your guard, and consent not to their way; refrain your feet from their path.

The next thing that calls for your attention is, Fifthly, Wherein you may be said to consent to the enticement of sinners.

There are different degrees of consent. The highest is a complete conformity in temper and conduct. But those degrees, which are not so highly criminal, are wrong, and extremely injurious to the cause of religion and virtue. When you discover no disapprobation, or opposition, you virtually, though tacitly, consent

to the enticement of sinners. Nor have you any right to accuse them with unfairness, if, from such manifest indifference on your part, they say, "He that is not against us is for us;" and conclude, that you in heart consent, and will be induced by continued solicitation to do it in practice. It is not at all unlikely that this may soon be the case, if you are so wanting in virtuous resolution, as to manifest no abhorrence of what you deem sinful. If you are so irresolute, as not to discover an opposition of feeling and sentiment to what you know to be wrong, it is not to be expected you will long shun the practice of it. If you conceal, or justify, the iniquity of others, you will, in many cases, be partakers of their sins.

Some fancy themselves entirely innocent, if they do not conform, externally, to the way of the wicked, though they feel no abhorrence of it, and in no manner discountenance it, except by refusing open compliance with their solicitations. But this is all mistake.—He who does not abhor, and discountenance sin, implicitly consents to it. His silence and composure encourage bold transgressors and betray a want of virtue in himself. ——

— The consent is still more complete, when, instead of any visible disapprobation of their conduct, or indignation at their attempts to entice you into the paths of vice, you discover signs of pleasure and satisfaction. An approving air, a smiling countenance, or even a look of indifference, will embolden sinners, and give them reason to believe you are almost ready to join them hand in hand. Such appearances would not be exhibited if you were not in some measure consenting, or very indifferent about their conduct. The face is an index of the mind. By it sinners read your feelings and sentiments. The countenances of those with whom they are conversant restrain, or render them more active and persevering in their attempts to extend the dominion of sin. There is no person, perhaps, who cannot rebuke, or reprove, by a single look. Strong disapprobation may be expressed in the countenance; and, when words may be improper, looks and gestures must supply their place. If they do not, what will sinners conclude, but that they have gained your consent? They who wish to hold a fair moral character often give encouragement to the wicked and profligate by their apparent indifference, or satisfaction. —

—We add, consent to the enticement of sinners is discovered by an evident fondness for their company, by pushing into the way of their examples, and even by not taking pains to avoid them. He who does not in some degree consent, is careful "not to walk in the counsel of the ungodly, not to stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of the scornful." Not exercising this caution is a strong indication of a consenting mind, of a disposition conformed to their views and practices. —

It is too great a compliment, something like consent, to suffer yourselves to attend without reply, or rebuke, to what they say and do, to urge you into any vice. To allow your minds to be shaken, and brought into doubt respecting the truth of scripture, or the lawfulness or unlawfulness of those pleasures and indulgences you have judged criminal, by the arts or arguments of sinners, has the appearance of consenting in a degree, and indicates a secret inclination to adopt their sentiments and manners, if conscience can by any means be pacified. In proportion to the doubt you admit, and to the strength of this inclination, every argument will receive new force, every art of seduction new aid, until your judgment is per-

verted, and you fall an easy prey to the wicked. The moment you hesitate whether to yield or not to the enticement of sinners, they have more than half gained their point. At the instant your resolution against it fails, the beginning of your consent is to be dated. The virtue that condescends to parley is not far from a surrender. The outworks are gone, and the citadel will be an easy conquest.

These observations prepare the way for taking into consideration, in the next place,

Sixthly, The extent of the prohibition in the text.

Upon this point, it is possible, many have fallen into mistake. They may conceive the prohibition relates, not to the common faults and follies of the irreligious, but to those heinous crimes mentioned in the context. To these it doubtless has particular respect; but it extends to every species of transgression. Some may imagine that the actual commission of the sins to which they are enticed is all that is forbidden. This is too great a limitation of the divine precept; for, as there may be several modes and degrees of consent to evil enticement, each tending to the highest, it is reasonable to conclude, every degree is prohibited;

that we are forbidden, in any measure, to consent to that which is wrong, and commanded, with a fixed resolution, to resist every temptation arising from the artful insinuations, or more direct attempts, of sinners, to entice us to sacrifice our virtue, and with it our hopes and happiness.

We are to shun, not only those horrid deeds perpetrated by bold transgressors, to which we may be sometimes urged; but the more common vices and irregularities of mankind; and, lest we should appear to be on the part of sinners, discountenance them in every prudent method, and avow our determination to pursue a course of piety and virtue in spite of all opposition. We are not at liberty to bestow a smile, or nod of approbation, upon a vile person in the actual commission of wickedness; but our very looks should express detestation, not of his person, but of his conduct, and every gesture reprove those who entice us to be their companions in vice.

I would not, however, be understood to discourage an air of pleasantry and good humour in the company of the wicked, if it can be exhibited without apparent approbation of their vices, or consent to their evil practices; much

less would I be thought to recommend to the virtuous and religious that gloomy aspect, that sadness of countenance, which is indicative either of base hypocrisy, or an unpleasing melancholy, rather than of conscious purity and integrity of heart. Such appearances, when considered as the effect, or the necessary appendages, of religion and virtue, will prejudice beholders against the very name of christians. The inconsiderate are apt to take the picture of religion from the gloomy distorted features and countenances, which many of its avowed votaries are fond of presenting to their view. By such means religion is painted in false colours, is dressed in an attire that does not belong to her. They who are good, or would be thought so, by such appearances aid sinners in enticing others from the ways of wisdom, and in exciting a fear to be virtuous upon religious principles. Persons of the strictest piety, and who possess most of the genuine spirit of christianity, will endeavour to convince others that Christ's yoke is easy, and his burden light; not that they are under bondage, or in chains so galling that every breath must be a sigh, every word a groan, and every look an expression of inward horror. Nor will they feel themselves

restrained from every amusement; from such as may invigorate their mental and bodily powers. They know that, in the course of divine providence, "there is a time to laugh and a time to weep;" and that, by prohibiting innocent amusements, they may provoke others to break over all restraint, to leap all bounds of decency and decorum.

But nothing that is vicious, or wrong in respect to season and circumstances, should be any part of your amusement. If any thing of this kind be introduced, you are bound to show that it damps your spirits, and gives uneasiness to your minds. This feeling you should be careful to manifest to those who would introduce that which is immoral, or even indecorous. The company that exhibits evil examples, and would entice and allure you to imitate them, you are studiously to avoid, and to reject their proposals with indignation. This is the course that religion and virtue will suggest; and it is by fair construction, enjoined in the text; which forbids every degree of consent to the enticement of sinners, and is applicable to persons of either sex, and of every age. But as youth, in an especial manner, are liable to be influenced by the corrupt manners and commu-

nications of the wicked, I proceed, in the next place,

Seventhly, To offer several motives to dissuade them from consenting to the enticement of sinners.

To every friend of virtue, to every lover of human kind, it would afford high satisfaction, my young friends, to observe in you a disposition to receive and follow the counsel of the wise king of Israel. But, when we consider the baneful influence the example and persuasion of sinners have had upon many, who once bid fair to tread the path of virtue, and rise to a blessed immortality; when we think on the strange enchantment there is in the company of the wicked; we may well be anxious for those exposed to it, and diffident of success in addressing them. The importance of the case, however, calls for our exertion, and claims your candid attention.

It behoves you to reflect most seriously on the subject, and ever to remember, that in consenting to the enticement of sinners, so far as to imbibe their sentiments and adopt their practices (to which every degree of consent has a direct tendency) you become their associates and companions in folly, are continually exposed to

the vilest arts and examples, lose your virtue, and all hope of rational happiness. Incalculable mischief results from the first consent to frequent their company. Associating with them will have an effect, and by degrees produce conformity to their temper and manners. Every serious impression and correct sentiment will gradually wear away, the checks of conscience become feeble, and your propensity to evil strengthened. Surrounded by vile companions, who are ever urging you on from one vice to another, and dissipating every serious thought that may rise in your minds, small will be the prospect of your repentance and reformation, and numerous the evils you must experience in this life, which are not felt by the pious and good. However great the round of criminal pleasures, you cannot avoid a consciousness of guilt. This will create a sense of inferiority, which will excite envy, and thus sap the foundation of your happiness. When you have once yielded to the enticement and seductive arts of sinners, you will feel that you are degraded in the estimation, not of the virtuous only, but of your very seducers, who are not less faulty, and as unhappy as yourselves. Having consented, and by doing it lost your virtue, you

will be directed by your ruling passions ; and, without a vigorous effort to retrieve your character, and change your course, be continually sinking into the depths of vice and wickedness. Besides, the pleasures you pursue will pall on the senses, and in review will be more disgusting than religion and virtue, if these were in fact as gloomy and debasing as they are sometimes represented by those who would excite the highest prejudice in your minds against them.

The loss of reputation, to a noble mind a most painful reflection, is among the evils that result from a consent to the enticement of sinners. To this frequently succeeds the privation of health, and sometimes the loss of life. But, if capital crimes should be avoided, intemperance and debauchery, to which they are exposed, who join sinful companions, often incapacitate persons for the enjoyment even of their forbidden pleasures, and shorten their days. By consenting, they lay snares in their own path, dig a pit for themselves, and lurk privily for their own life. They run into innumerable dangers and troubles in this world, and subject themselves to the most distressing feelings and apprehensions at every interval of sober reflec-

tion. "They are like the troubled sea, whose waters cast up mire and dirt."

But what are temporal evils, in comparison with what they must expect in that state of righteous retribution, into which they are hastening? "A companion of fools shall be destroyed." What is said of one description of sinners is in a sense applicable to all. "Their house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death." Destruction is in their paths. "The soul that sinneth shall die." This is the sentence God hath delivered, and will he reverse it? Have you any reason to expect an acquittal, if found among the workers of iniquity, when brought before the judge of quick and dead? The shame and remorse the greatest offenders feel in this life are but faint representations of what they will then experience. In the world to come horror and anguish will overwhelm their guilty souls. Those who are their associates here will there be their companions, drinking the same cup of misery. Will it then, think ye, be any relief to call to mind the days in which you shared with them in sinful pleasures? Will your friendship continue? and will you endeavour by tender offi-

ces to mitigate each other's woe? Little reason have you to expect the future state of punishment will be the seat of friendship. All will be rage and enmity, perpetual discord and mutual crimination and abhorrence! As sinners entice each other into folly and wickedness here, and are means of increasing their guilt, it is not unreasonable to believe, that they will then be mutual tormentors. It is well known that when associates in any crimes punishable by human laws are arrested and confined together in prison, they accuse and reproach each other, and thus render their situation more wretched. Why should not this be the case in the future state? Weigh the certain, and probable consequences of consenting when sinners entice you, and you, it is hoped, will resolve never to yield. Reflect on the superiour pleasures and enjoyments, which must be sacrificed to guilty pursuits, and your resolution to withstand every temptation will be strengthened. The refined generous feelings and sentiments of the soul, which are the source of true satisfaction and enjoyment, find no place, the happiness resulting from conscious integrity is lost, the delights arising from grateful emotions of heart to God

are known no more, the society of the excellent of the earth is in a measure abandoned, and, what is still more, the hope of being hereafter admitted into the immediate presence of God and the Redeemer, and of joining with angels and perfected saints in everlasting songs of praise, will be destroyed. Every thing worthy of a rational desire is in effect sacrificed, or relinquished, by yielding to the enticement of sinners; and what can any promise themselves that will compensate them for the degrading service into which they enter? What can they propose as an equivalent for innocence, virtue, purity, and piety? Do sinners persuade you that there is no pleasure, no enjoyment, without their enchanted circle? They of all men are the greatest strangers to true and rational pleasure. Let those who have been seduced from the path of virtue and innocence into criminal indulgences be honest, and say if they have not been disappointed. Let them show the mighty advantage they have gained at the expense of religion, virtue, and character. Deluded mortals! this they will find a task not less difficult than unpleasant. The pleasures of sin leave a sting behind; those of religion and virtue, peace and joy. Say, is there no happiness, no satisfac-

tion, to be enjoyed in the society of the virtuous and good? None, perhaps, for one who hath chosen to be a companion of evil doers. But sublime pleasures, increasing delight, and animating hope, are the portion of those, who are pure in heart, who fear God and keep his commandments. Be ye persuaded, therefore, my young friends, who have not yet been insnared, to guard against every temptation, enticement, and allurement, to join with the wicked in their folly; and if any have consented, let them be intreated instantly to burst the bands by which they are bound to their sinful associates; to forsake the foolish, that they may live. May the divine power and mercy rescue them from the snares of death, and raise them to virtue and piety, to glory, honour, and immortality.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. The view we have taken of the subject will teach you, my young friends, the necessity of family government, and convince you that it is the duty of your parents, masters, guardians, and instructors, to watch over, counsel, and direct your course. Your want of experience, natural ardour and vivacity, the heat of your

passions, and, I may add, your fondness for novelty, expose you to many unseen dangers, and render you extremely liable to be drawn into folly and ruin by the enticement of sinners. If you are convinced of this, you will acknowledge that those, to whom providence hath intrusted the care of your infancy, childhood, and youth, ought to exercise their utmost skill and authority to guard and restrain you from the paths of wickedness. Are they not bound in duty to God, and to you, to watch, counsel, instruct, and govern you. Can you pretend, whatever your feelings of opposition may be, that parents and masters, or the heads and directors of any literary institution, in which you may be placed, would be faithful to their trust, unless they take care to preserve you from the corrupting influence of those, who would entice you to evil? When instruction, advice, and example fail to effect the object, ought they not to interpose authority? If God hath commanded you not to consent when sinners entice you, will you think your parents, masters, or instructors unreasonable, if they endeavour to enforce the divine precept? They are accountable to God for their conduct towards you, and can never be justified in his sight if they do not

use their influence and authority to preserve you from every evil practice, and lead you into the paths of honour, virtue, and piety.

It was a charge against Eli of old, on which was grounded an awful sentence against him, and his house, "that his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not." He admonished and reproved them; but did not exercise the authority he possessed to restrain their wickedness. God therefore determined to cut off the house of Eli, and declared that it "should not be purged with sacrifice nor offering forever." The sentence was executed; and is recorded for the admonition of parents, in all succeeding ages, to exercise their authority to restrain their children from vice and wickedness. Consider what is their duty, and you will easily discover your own in respect to them.

It will not be denied that much of the sin and folly of youth is to be imputed to the neglect of parents, masters and instructors, in not attending to the inclination and habits of those under them, and early imposing proper restraint. In some instances, heads of families, by their own instruction and examples, entice their children and domesticks into gross folly and iniquity. How melancholy the thought! If those, to

whom the direction and government of youth are committed, felt the importance of the trust, and would consider how much depends on the faithful execution of it, they could not fail to watch over those under their care with the most tender solicitude, and, as much as possible, guard them against every snare and temptation.

It is an important branch of duty, which devolves on all who have the care and government of youth, early to impress their minds with religious sentiments, with the idea of the divine presence, and to excite a dread of offending God, and a desire of approving themselves to him; to represent vice in its true colours, and convince them that it is degrading and ruinous to every human being. They should, at the same time, exhibit examples of piety and virtue, and the best evidence that these afford true pleasure and satisfaction.

There can be no doubt that youth are sometimes prejudiced against religion and virtue by the gloomy, or austere appearance, and indiscreet management, of those under whose care and government providence hath placed them. This is a great infelicity. It is an errour that should be carefully avoided. The parent, or master, should endeavour to persuade the young,

that the highest satisfaction results from true religion and virtue, that their honour and happiness depend on their shunning the society of the vicious, and keeping themselves pure. Children and youth should be taught to respect themselves, and not to degrade their nature, and pervert their powers and faculties. Parents, and others, on whom parental duty devolves, should watch, and, when occasion requires, interpose their authority, that good impressions may not be obliterated by sinful associates, and that the minds of those committed to their care may not be prejudiced against the lessons of wisdom, by the arts of the wicked.

You will at once allow, my young friends, that the admonition, or advice, in the text is proper for a parent to give to a child; and that, if given in sincerity, the parent must feel solicitous to enforce it, and give it a practical influence, by every mean in his power. You must therefore perceive and confess in the next place,

2. That it is your duty to receive the advice, and to submit to the authority by which the parent would enforce its practical observance. Whatever the parent, master, or instructor, is in duty bound to enjoin, youth are not at liber-

ty to resist, or censure; but must be under obligation to observe and obey. Contempt of parental authority and government, disobedience and opposition to the regulations of families, schools and seminaries, are among the vices and follies into which sinners entice their more virtuous companions. Their first efforts are often directed to this object; which, in many instances, is too easily accomplished. Youth are disposed to live and act without control, to manifest impatience under any kind of restraint, and to think they are more capable of directing their own choice and conduct, than their parents, or instructors. They frequently imagine, without the least reason, that parents, masters, governours, or instructors, have an interest opposite to theirs, and that they impose restraint, or establish rules of conduct, to gratify their own humour, and not for the benefit of those under their care. This is, in general, a most groundless suspicion, arising from a predisposition of mind, which gives great advantage to those sinners, who are determined opposers to order and government in families, schools, and other literary institutions, and enables them to gain an extensive consent to their enticement to evil. That they may possess this advantage,

sinners will, if possible, excite such suspicion in minds that never entertained it, and produce impatience under a government they before esteemed mild, equitable, and good. The consequence is dissatisfaction and resentment at the exercise of the authority God and nature have committed to heads of families, and of such institutions, for the benefit of those placed under their inspection and government. But, my young friends, every expression of this dissatisfaction and resentment, more especially every act of opposition and resistance, under parental discipline and restraint, or under the laws and regulations of the institutions in which you may be placed for your improvement, indicates a perverse temper, and leaves very little reason to believe you will resist the enticement of sinners, to whatever folly and excess it may lead. It is their wish to excite a spirit of hostility in your bosoms against your best friends, and to flatter you with the idea that you are capable of self-government, and that it is mean to submit to the direction and control of any authority but your own reason and inclination. But this is contrary to the order of nature, and to the happiness of society. Parents were no more obliged to guard your infancy, than they are to guide

your youthful steps; and filial duty requires your submission to their authority and direction. Weigh and apply the subject, and you will, in this respect, guard against the enticement of sinners. But,

3. As you possess a power of judging, and have a rule by which to determine what is right, and what wrong; as you are in danger of consenting, in some, if not in the highest degree, to the enticement of sinners; and as every degree of consent is destructive in its tendency, and forbidden, you ought to examine well the nature of your conduct, and see to what it will lead or expose you. Pains must be taken to inform your minds, and respect paid to the sober dictates of your own consciences. You must not suffer inclination, as many youth have done, to blind your understanding, or to bias your judgment. You should suppress inclination, until you have determined whether its indulgence would be lawful and right. Nor ought you to consent, in any degree, to the conduct of others, if it do not first meet the appprobation of your own reason and conscience; if you do, you will be partakers of their sins. Look well to your own hearts, and be careful how you order your steps. Many have fallen by the

devices of the wicked, never to rise again to virtue and happiness. Shun their path, that you may not come into the same condemnation. We add,

4. That, as innumerable evil consequences follow a consent to the enticement of sinners, and as you are liable to be insensibly drawn into it, and by your example to draw others into the same snare, you ought to arm yourselves with the most fixed resolution against yielding, and watch that you may shun the rock, which has proved fatal to thousands. "Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird." If you see your danger, it may be avoided; and you must see it, unless you shut your eyes.

But, my friends, while you guard against the enticement, the corrupting influence and examples of sinners, be exhorted not to become dangerous companions to others, by your own improper conduct and conversation; but strive to allure them into wisdom's ways, to the love and practice of every thing excellent and praiseworthy.

That you may be preserved in the midst of the dangers that await you, and be guided in the way of truth and righteousness, humbly seek to God, through Jesus Christ, for the wis-

dom which is profitable to direct. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may stand against the wiles of the devil. Let your loins be girt about with truth, having on the breast-plate of righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel. Above all, take the shield of faith, wherewith you shall be able to quench the fiery darts of the wicked.

SERMON VI.

ON THE DEVOTION OF THE HEART AND LIFE TO GOD.

PROVERBS xxiii. 26.

My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways.

My young friends, this is the endearing language of your Father in heaven. The sense of it is plain. God addresses you as his children, and teaches you the whole sum of your duty to him. "My son," my daughter, "give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways." Compliance with this demand is religion in principle and practice, in affection and conduct. If you would be truly religious, heart and life must be devoted to God. He requires your purest love, and your unreserved submission and obedience. In this discourse we shall invite your attention to the manner, subject,

and reasonableness, of the divine requisition contained in the text.

1. As to the manner, nothing can be more tender and endearing. The language is affectionate, and expressive of the feelings of a kind parent toward a beloved child. If you consider it as addressed by a holy God to his offending offspring on earth, it must make some impression on your minds. "My son"——What surprising condescension in the infinite Majesty of heaven, that he should own apostate man in this relation! With the pity, as well as with the authority of a father, he calls us back to our duty, and, to encourage our return, reminds us of our relation and consequent obligation to him. The expression intimates his disposition to own, and treat us as his children, and to grant us the privileges and inheritance that appertain to this relation. It teaches that, as an earthly parent desires the honour and happiness of his children, so our heavenly Father regards our welfare with a benignant eye; and that, as our fathers according to the flesh claim our filial affection, so he, who is infinitely more worthy and kind than they, requires our undissembled love. Every thing that the character of the most tender parent can suggest is implied in

God's addressing human beings as his children. The manner is gracious, and encourages our humble approach to him, as to a father, for every thing necessary to our own improvement and happiness. It indicates his readiness to forgive our offences, to pity our weakness, to supply our wants, to preserve our life, to direct our path, and to secure to us the inheritance of sons.

This compassion and goodness of God toward sinful men are strikingly illustrated in the parable of the prodigal son. The conduct of the father toward his returning child, and the language used on the affecting occasion, represent the tender mercy of our heavenly Father, and his willingness to receive us to favour, and to enrich us from the treasures of his goodness. But, in order to our being objects of his complacency, and subjects of his favour, like the prodigal, we must return from our wanderings, confess our sin, give him our hearts, and obey his commandments.

This leads us to consider,

2. The subject of the requisition in the text.

This requisition consists of two parts.

First, God demands the heart. "My son, give me thine heart." The nature and extent of this demand merit attention.

The heart is the seat of the affections, and the spring of moral action. In demanding this, God claims our supreme love, and the consecration of all our moral powers and faculties to his honour and service. The first commandment requires us to "love the Lord our God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength." This love to God, including its natural fruit, "is the fulfilling of the law;" it is the fundamental principle of true religion, and without it there can be no acceptable obedience. When persons give their hearts to God, they devote themselves and all their powers to him. The whole soul is inclined to him, as its chief good, the object of its highest esteem and most ardent desire. The affections of the heart are the wings on which it is carried toward God in the exercises of piety and obedience. Love, supreme love to him, which includes, or to which may be traced, every pure and holy affection, is the foundation and spring of all that is morally good in man. Different religious affections are only different modifications of true love to God, adapted to particular purposes; and may be

traced back from their respective objects to the principle from which they take their rise. Evangelical obedience flows from this general principle, which inclines every person actuated by it, to do the will of God, and accommodates itself to every circumstance that attends the performance of duty. The love of our neighbour, though made the subject of a particular command, is a modification of true love to God, or naturally proceeds from it; and whatever may be its genuine effect, or fruit, is implied in giving the heart to him.

The extent, therefore, of the requisition may be perceived, if we attend to what we are assured will be both the effect and evidence of love to God, and to Jesus Christ. "If ye love me," said Christ, "ye will keep my word." The apostle John adopts similar language. "Hereby we do know that we love him, if we keep his commandments. Whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected. But whoso hath this world's goods and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"

Thus the observance of the divine law, not only in respect to the Deity, but also to our

fellow creatures, is represented to be the effect and evidence of true love to God. For the very reason that love inclines men to serve and place their happiness in the object of it, this precept is given, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world the love of the Father is not in him." The heart must not be divided between God and the world. Supreme love to both cannot dwell together. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

In challenging the heart as his right, God claims our first, strongest, and best affections, and all those acts of piety and obedience, to which they incline the will. In giving him their hearts, or supreme love, persons devote all their powers and faculties to his service, resolving that, though other lords have had dominion over them, they will henceforth be the servants of the Most High, and direct all their views and desires to him, and to his honour and glory. All this comes within the nature and design of the requisition in the text.

Such affections, and such surrender of ourselves to God are required, that we may be like him, that his moral image may be reinstamped on the human soul. Pure and supreme love to

him naturally draws the heart into a conformity to the moral perfections of the Deity. We must exercise it, that we may be perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect. "Be ye holy; for I the Lord your God am holy." Giving him the heart, or loving him with all the heart, constitutes an inward resemblance of him; for "God is love;" his nature, his essence is love; all his ways and works are ways and works of love.

This attribute is the perfection of God's moral character; it is this that renders him infinitely glorious; and in this he calls us to be like him, that he may have complacency in us. This principle, so far as it operates, brings men back to the image of their creator. "A conformity of heart to God in love is the highest perfection of human nature, and therefore must be the sum of all religion." Actuated by such a principle, the soul will deny itself, and live to God. Mean, selfish, and unworthy views and desires find no lasting place in it; all tend to their proper centre, and are sanctified by the holy object, to which they are directed.

This giving of the heart to God is something more than those transient affections, which are sometimes drawn forth by particular acts of his

goodness. It is widely different from merely drawing nigh to God with your mouth, and honouring him with your lips! Can you, my young friends, suppose any thing less than an entire surrender of yourselves, any thing short of your purest and strongest affection, is intended, when God commands you to give him your heart? Will any thing, short of what we have insisted on, bring your souls into his likeness, and be acceptable to him? Will any thing, besides this supreme love, be a steady principle of holy obedience to the law of God? If not, as you must all confess, then the claim made to the heart includes every degree of love and holy affection, of which human beings are capable. This is the first part of the requisition in our text. The other is no more than the natural result of a sincere compliance with this; but it is made the subject of particular notice and command; and is,

Secondly, "Let thine eyes observe my ways."

As the former constitutes the whole sum of religion, in its internal principle, so this may intend the whole of it so far as it consists in external obedience to the laws and institutions of heaven. This part of the text is a figurative,

but pertinent and forcible mode of expression. It intends a careful application of the mind to the practical duties of religion, and such a wise observance of the ways of God, as shall teach and impress a sense of duty to him, and regulate the outward behaviour.

By observing the ways of God, as they are opened to view in the scheme of providence and grace, persons will be inclined more unreservedly to give the heart to him, and more attentively to apply themselves to the several branches of practical godliness. His ways are full of instruction, and may be contemplated with advantage, whether we understand by them the dispensations of his providence and grace, or the laws and statutes he hath ordained for the regulation of human affections and actions.

It is no uncommon thing for some people to imagine that religion consists wholly in the exercises of the mind, and for others to think it principally relates to external behaviour, to modes and forms of worship, and to regular and moral conduct. But both are essential to true religion. They cannot be separated without destroying its existence. He, who is destitute of love to God, has no truly religious principle; and he, who is not virtuous and holy in life and

conversation, has no genuine love to him. Principle and practice combine to form the character of a good man. As the heart must be devoted to God, so the life must be subjected to the laws he hath ordained for its regulation.

But it will not be a perversion of the design of the text, if we suppose this branch of the requisition obliges us to "have an eye to the rule of God's word, the conduct of his providence, and the good examples of his people. Our eyes must observe these, as he, that writes, observes his copy, that we may keep in the right paths, and persevere in them." We may observe the ways of God,

1. In respect to his holy word, which contains a perfect rule of faith and practice, and presents the best motives to piety and virtue. In examining this, we are carefully to notice the marks and evidences of its proceeding from God. If we observe his ways, we shall see that it has the stamp of divine authority upon it, that the proof of this, arising from its internal character, and from external attestations, is conclusive and irresistible in the view of all honest inquirers.

The doctrines of revelation relating to the being and perfections of God, to his spirituality and holiness, his justice, wisdom, and goodness; to our relation, dependence, and apostasy; to the nature and consequences of sin, the method of recovery, and the benevolence in which the wonderful scheme of redemption originated; all these should be observed and contemplated, not merely as matters of speculation, but with a view to their practical influence. Let the eye of the mind be fixed on the ways of God in these respects, and the best affections of the heart will centre in him, and the life be devoted to his honour.

The divine word teaches us that, when man had ruined himself, God provided a Saviour, "who died for our offences, and rose again for our justification;" and who established a pure rational and practical system of religion and morality, which is calculated to form men to a spirit of holiness, and to train them up for endless felicity. This word is an inexhaustible treasury of the most useful instruction. It enlightens the understanding, enlarges the mind, presents a clear view of the most interesting subjects, and points out the duty and destiny of man. It furnishes rules and maxims to direct

and edify the pious, motives to reform the sinner, hopes to comfort the desponding, and at the same time affords entertainment to the curious and inquisitive. In the judgment of some of the greatest geniuses the world has produced, there is no source of information and instruction, which affords so much light and satisfaction to the inquisitive mind, as the holy oracles. These present a striking view of the ways of God, and inspire the soul with the most pure and sublime sentiments. But,

2. The ways of God are to be observed in the conduct of his providence.

There is an analogy between the natural and moral world. As in the former it is sometimes fair, at others cloudy, sometimes calm, at others tempestuous, sometimes light, at others dark; so it is with the aspects of providence; they are sometimes smiling, at others frowning and portentous. Like the cloud that guided Israel from Egypt to Canaan, the bright and dark side of which were presented for their advantage, the different dispensations of providence are intended for the benefit of mankind. At one period God grants prosperity, and causes the light of his favourable countenance to shine upon his people with a steady lustre, that they may be

induced to serve and obey him; at another he frowns and visits them with judgments, that he may correct their backsliding, and recover them from their wickedness. His providential dispensations afford instruction to the mind, and present powerful motives to practical godliness.

3. In the examples of good men we may observe the ways of God. They show his power and goodness, and instruct us in the duties of piety and patience. The righteous are not exempted from trials and afflictions; but, in chastening them, God *dealeth with them as with sons.* When, therefore, any engage in the cause of religion, if they meet with trials, they should observe the ways of God to others, that they may not suppose their own case singular, or their troubles beyond example; but be encouraged to trust in the same power and goodness that have delivered, or supported, those whose life and character they contemplate, and be induced to imitate the virtues they notice with admiration, to exercise like patience, meekness, humility, and submission. In prosperity as well, as in adversity, they should observe how good men have been affected and behaved in a similar situation, how they improved the

smiles of providence, and acknowledged the author of their mercies.

But, though these things are to be carefully observed, yet it is with a view that the observer may be drawn into a right course of conduct. The principal and ultimate design of this branch of the requisition in the text, is to call the attention of mankind to the practical duties of religion and morality, to engage them in the study of the divine law, and in uniform obedience to its requirements. To promote this external conformity to the will of God the observing of his ways, in the instances mentioned, has a natural tendency, as by it men gain instruction, and discover the best motives to religion and virtue. This is the object to be effected. Religion in principle and affection must be reduced to practice.

The heart can never be right with God, if the life be habitually opposed to his law. That faith is dead, which does not produce good works ; that love to God vain, or defective, which does not incline a person to keep all his commandments. Whatever religious impressions, or affections, any imagine they have experienced, there is no solid reason to believe they have given their hearts to God, unless they

are habitually disposed to the practice of universal righteousness, and do actually perform the outward duties of religion. He, that demands the heart, or our purest and most ardent affections, requires us likewise to keep his statutes, to do his wil, to let our light shine before men, in holy examples and practical godliness, that they may be induced to imitate our good conversation in Christ, and glorify our Father in heaven.

It is of high importance to realize in what manner we ought to observe the ways of God. We are to do it with a watchful eye, or with an attentive mind. His word and works are too interesting to merit only a cursory survey, and too deep and intricate to be seen and understood at a single glance. They are great and "wonderful, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein." The deep things of God are to be sought out with attention, and contemplated with profound reverence. The reason why men are so ignorant of God and his holy law, is because they are not attentive to his ways and works, do not apply their thoughts to the subjects they are daily called to examine; but, through criminal negligence, lose the ideas and impressions they at times gain from a partial and cursory

view. If the mind were seriously angaged in contemplating them, and in seeking instruction in duty from them, its apprehensions would be enlarged, and its admiring thoughts dwell upon the amazing grandeur, proportion, contrivance, wisdom, and goodness, which run through the whole, and impress a sense of our obligation to serve and obey their author.

Believing, as we may with the highest reason, that the good of man is one great object of the divine administration, ought we not to contemplate the parts of it, which fall under our notice, especially these that more particularly relate to ourselves, with the most profound reverence and gratitude? When we see the heavens declaring the glory of God, the firmament showing his handy work, day unto day uttering speech, night unto night imparting knowledge, and the volume of inspiration opening to us the treasures of wisdom and grace, teaching us our duty, and pointing out the way to eternal life, can we avoid feeling some grateful emotions, which will incline us to that obedience which will be acceptable to the author of such blessings?

We add, the ways of God are to be observed with entire submission to him, as the righteous

governour of the world. Knowledge is no further useful, than it relates to and influences practice. To know the works of God, to observe his ways in the kingdoms of nature, providence, and grace, to understand his laws and statutes, will be of very little advantage, unless it influence and direct our inward temper, and outward conduct. In observing and contemplating the ways of God, we are to seek moral instruction, to strive to know what is the mind and will of the Lord, that we may keep his statutes and his judgments. This is one part of the duty enjoined in the text. "My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways."

III. The third thing proposed is, to consider the reasonableness of this requisition; which we have contemplated in two distinct branches, though they are inseparably connected.

1. It is altogether reasonable to give your hearts to God in the most full and unreserved manner; because he is infinitely worthy of your supreme love. Every possible perfection centres in him. To be admired and adored, his character and attributes need only to be perceived and contemplated. There is no real excellence but what is essential to God, and, in whatever subject it may appear, proceeds from

him, as its underived and eternal fountain. All that is lovely and desirable in man, or in the highest angel, is but a faint resemblance of his infinite amiableness and perfection in natural and moral excellence. If, then, God be infinitely lovely on account of his purity, holiness, and other essential attributes, it must be fit and reasonable for him to require, and for us to give to him, our hearts, or best affections. There is no other object worthy of supreme love, and, when we bestow it on any other, we go contrary to the dictates of reason; for these teach us to love that object in the highest degree, which is most worthy and excellent. To do this is rational, and would be natural, if the heart were not corrupted, and its moral powers perverted. But, until we can do this, our corruption will remain; and, though we possess rational faculties, we shall act contrary to reason. Supreme love to God is founded as well in the reasonableness of the thing, as in the authority of a divine command.

But, it may be asked, is it not natural, and therefore reasonable, that we should love ourselves more than, or in preference to, any other object? I grant it is very natural for depraved man to do it; but not that it is reasonable, un-

less it can be proved that he possesses greater real excellence and amiableness than any other object; which it would be impious to suppose. Besides, that is an improper and injurious love of ourselves, which is inconsistent with supreme love to God, or which he hath not so woven into our nature, as to be an essential part of our constitution. When love is a rational affection and exercise of the mind, and not merely a natural passion, goodness and excellence will be its object; and as these are essential to the Deity, and exist in him in the highest perfection, he is the proper object of our supreme love.

But we need not rest the argument on his inherent perfections. His propriety in us, his authority over us, and his communicative goodness to us, prove the perfect justice and reasonableness of his claim to our hearts. We are his workmanship, formed and sustained by his hand, for the purpose of promoting his glory. As our creator, preserver, and benefactor, he has a right to our best affections. In demanding these, he requires no more than his own. He made us what we are, that is, dependent creatures, and gave us all our powers and facul-

ties; and therefore has an exclusive title to our purest affections and services.

Were man in a state of independence, there would be some reason to question his obligation to give his heart to God. But, my friends, you are every moment dependent upon God for what you possess and enjoy; and every hour's experience of the sustaining hand of his providence, and of his communicative goodness, renews his reasonable demand of your grateful love.

The gift of his beloved Son for the redemption of your souls from the power of sin and death, is a wonderful instance of his goodness and grace. It claims the warmest affections and gratitude. The blessings that flow from God, through Jesus Christ, who is able and ready to relieve all our moral necessities, and bring us to the possession of the joys of heaven, must impress on the mind a rational and lively sense of obligation to love the Lord our God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength. The objects of such unbounded compassion, the subjects of such wonderful grace, can never exceed their duty in returns of love and grateful affection.

As, then, God is in himself infinitely worthy; as he hath created you, and endued you with the powers and faculties you possess; as he hath sustained you amidst the dangers to which you have been exposed; as he hath, in a variety of ways, and in rich abundance, communicated his goodness, and made you partakers of his bounty; and especially as he hath sent his Son into the world to redeem, sanctify, and save your souls; can any thing be more reasonable, than that you should give him your hearts, your purest love, your best affections? On what rational principle, my young friends, could you refuse this, if it were demanded as a matter of mere gratitude and homage to so good a being, so kind a benefactor, so compassionate and gracious a Saviour? But, how much more reasonable the requisition appears, when we reflect, that supreme love to God is the perfection of our own nature, entirely consistent with true love of ourselves, and promotive of our highest improvement and felicity? If, then, this part of the requisition be reasonable, it will appear,

2. That the other is equally so, and is justified upon the same general principles. All that this intends will naturally result from a sincere compliance with the demand God makes of our

hearts, or supreme love. Observing his ways, or keeping his commandments, is to act in conformity to, and under the influence of that internal principle of religion, which consists in a devotedness of the heart, and its affections to him. It is reducing the principle to practice, and thus proving its existence, and cherishing and strengthening it in the soul. This practical holiness, or conformity to the law and will of God, and attentive regard to his ways, are the ornament and happiness of the christian. They secure to him many advantages, have an influence on beholders, prove the reality of his religious affections, and promote the divine glory.

The religion, that has not a practical influence, that produces no good effect in the life and conversation, that does not regulate the external behaviour of a person, and engage him to be strict in outward acts of piety, in attending upon the ordinances and institutions God hath appointed, and in moral and social duties, is of very little value, and can never spring from true and supreme love to the Deity. It may be such as will sour the temper of a bigot, inflame the zeal of an enthusiast, and serve the purpose of a hypocrite; but it cannot give peace and joy

to the mind, nor receive the divine approbation. Though there may be a form of religion without the power, an apparent regard to divine ordinances without a sincere desire to honour God by keeping them, and an outward conformity to moral maxims without any religious fear and love; yet, if these external duties of religion and morality be neglected, when there is opportunity to practise them, it is certain the internal principle is defective, that the heart is not devoted to God, or inspired with supreme love to him. Obedience is better than sacrifice; and though it must flow from the heart, in order to be acceptable to God, it must appear by outward conformity to his command, to his law and will, or it cannot be acknowledged and approved. In true religion inward affections and outward actions are so blended, that they cannot be separated, even in idea, without taking from it, in the view of a well informed mind, some of its essential properties. A sanctified heart and a holy life are alike necessary to the character of a good man. It is therefore as reasonable to require obedience in outward conduct, as to demand the purest affections of the heart.

dom which is profitable to direct. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may stand against the wiles of the devil. Let your loins be girt about with truth, having on the breast-plate of righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel. Above all, take the shield of faith, wherewith you shall be able to quench the fiery darts of the wicked.

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The phrase in the text, "let thine eyes observe my ways," intends either this external conformity to the law and will of God, or such a careful attention to the displays he hath made of himself in his word and works, as shall lead to the discovery of his will, and our duty. The first of these interpretations supposes an understanding and performance of the divine will; the second an inquiry into it, in order that it may be obeyed. In either sense it amounts to the same thing, and enjoins practical obedience.

It is, indeed, a most reasonable and useful exercise of our faculties, to observe the ways of God in the latter sense. The psalmist prayed that his eye might be turned away from beholding vanity. The reason is, because vain objects too easily attract the heart, and too deeply engage its affections. But he, who attentively observes the ways of God, and inquires into their design and tendency, is kept from beholding vanity, is not captivated by the allurements that often ensnare, debase, and ruin others. The objects to which his attention is directed fill him with admiration, impart instruction, and afford delight. He perceives such light and truth in God's word, and such instruction in the conduct of his providence, and in the ex-

amples of the saints, that he finds himself growing in knowledge and prepared to serve the Lord with a more perfect heart and ready mind. The bible is a history of the ways of God to man, and contains the great mystery of godliness, which it behoves every one to receive and examine, and which is calculated to refine and exalt human nature. In it the attentive observer beholds a wonderful scheme of providence, and plan of grace, gradually unfolding from the fall of man to the advent of the Messiah, and the establishment of the christian dispensation. He finds that salvation can be obtained only through the mediation of Christ, and that faith, repentance, love to God, and obedience to his will, are the terms on which eternal life is offered. The wisdom and goodness manifested in this part of the divine economy excite his admiration, and impress on the mind a sense of obligation to notice and apply it for his own moral improvement.

The purpose to be answered by observing the ways of God, in this or any other respect, is, that we may understand his character and will, and become conformed to him in purity and holiness. Unless this be the effect, though we may be filled with wonder, we shall derive

but little advantage from our contemplations. But, with a view to this, our own reason enforces the duty enjoined by divine authority, and teaches us the perfect fitness of devoting both heart and life to the honour and service of God.

Having called your attention to the manner, subject, and reasonableness, of the requisition in the text, of giving your hearts to God, and of observing his ways, and keeping his statutes; as an improvement, let me remind you, my young friends, that the subject calls you to reflect,

1. On your relation to the great Parent of the universe. You are his children; and, as your Father, he requires your love and obedience. The tenderness he expresses toward you should excite a filial temper toward him, and induce you to prove yourselves worthy of your relation to him, by a conformity to his moral perfections and will.

Though sensible, that the human race have become rebellious children, that they have defaced that image of God, which was originally stamped upon them; yet you find, that he condescends to address you in the tender language of a father, and, in the most gracious terms, to

invite your return to him, and to encourage a hope in his goodness and mercy. He is pleased, like the father of the returning prodigal, to manifest a readiness to pardon and receive you, to treat you as children, and even to make you heirs of his kingdom. Think on your relation to God, and on his wonderful goodness to you; and then inquire what you owe him. You are not only subjects of his creating power, sustaining care, and providential blessings; but you are objects of redeeming love, and as such have the offers of salvation, through Jesus Christ, and the light of revelation to guide you, in the way of duty, to glory, honour, and immortality. Will you, then, disown, or act unworthy of your relation to God, when he, with such wonderful compassion and tenderness, is inviting you to acknowledge and obey him, as your father; and offering to make you partakers of a heavenly inheritance? If not, hearken to his voice, give him your hearts, and diligently observe his ways. Let him have your first and best affections, and his law your cordial approbation and cheerful obedience.

Our subject teaches, 2. That principle and practice, faith and obedience, affections and actions, constitute that religious homage and ser-

vice, which God requires of men. They are not to be separated, but united to form the character of a sincere christian, and true worshipper of God.

Be cautioned against mistake in this point. Youth are susceptible of sudden and strong impressions; and they often conclude from the violent emotions they have experienced, which arose from an uncommon agitation of their natural passions, that they have felt the power of religion, and actually given their hearts to God. Thousands have fallen into this errour; who have found, after the mechanical effect upon their passions had abated, that they are as destitute of the power and spirit of religion as they were before such emotions and agitations. From these it is not safe to conclude that the heart is renewed, and devoted to God. Supreme love to him grows out of just conceptions of his character, and rational conviction of his real excellence. It is not the result of a few feeble efforts; nor does it consist in transient exercises of the affections; but it is a fixed inclination of the heart and soul toward God, as the chief good, and the habitual exercise of the purest affections to him. These are a steady principle, or spring, of active obedience; without which you may be certain you have not given

your hearts to God in any truly religious sense. If you love him, you will keep his commandments. You will feel yourselves bound to observe and reverence all the ordinances and institutions of religion, and conscientiously perform all moral and social duties.

My friends, be persuaded to try and prove your own hearts by this rule, and not to trust to sudden impulses, to transient feelings, which are not accompanied and followed with rational piety, and practical goodness. You may be assured that, unless you bring forth the fruits of righteousness, you have no internal principle of holiness. Supposed change of temper and views, or fancied religious experiences, if not followed by a pious and virtuous conduct, can afford no well grounded hope and comfort. On the contrary, if made the foundation of confidence and assurance, may render your case more hazardous, by concealing from you the real state and condition of your souls. Beware of taking that for true religion, which is only the sudden and transient effect of animal passions.

But, 3. As it is perfectly reasonable that you should give your hearts to God, and observe his ways, or study and obey his will, be entreated not to neglect these high and important duties. The longer you suffer the world and its

vanities to engross your strongest affections, and to engage your pursuits, the more difficult will it be to fix them upon God and religion. Every hour's delay to comply with the requisition in the text must be a subject of future regret, and remorse. Let it, therefore, be your present determination and fixed resolution, that you will devote yourselves to God, that you will give him your hearts, observe his ways, and keep all his commandments. Attend to his word and povidence, strive to understand the wondrous things contained in his law, and the still more wondrous and glorious things revealed in the gospel of Christ. While you make him the object of your supreme love, and exert all your powers and faculties to observe his ways, pray to him for the enlightening and quickening influences of the holy spirit. He can furnish the means of instruction, open the ear to discipline, and incline the heart to wisdom. Wait, then, on the Lord, and commit your way unto him. And may he draw you with the chords of his love, guide you by his counsel, form you to his praise, and make you heirs of his heavenly kingdom, through Jesus Christ, whom he hath exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins.

SERMON VII.

CHRISTIANITY A MILD AND PRACTICABLE SYSTEM OF RELIGION.

MATTHEW xi. 30.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

THE most groundless prejudices are conceived against the religion of Jesus Christ. If we believe his enemies, we shall suppose it degrades the human character, and imposes on its votaries unreasonable duties and restraints. The youthful mind, in a peculiar manner, is susceptible of these prejudices, which the artful and designing wish to strengthen. But the danger of imbibing them does not arise wholly from the misrepresentation of enemies. Young persons sometimes receive impressions unfavourable to religion from a defective education, and the indiscretion of parents and instructers. But, in what way soever the mind is prepossessed against christianity, nothing is more true, than that this religion is the most mild, rational and pure, that the world has ever known. It is a

dispensation of grace, which breathes a spirit of benevolence, and forms the soul for heaven.

If, feeling that he must adopt some religion, man were at liberty to make his election out of all the systems that have been propagated, the christian religion rightly understood, would have his preference; not only on account of its greater reasonableness and better hopes, but because it prescribes the wisest and best rules of life. None of its laws, none of its injunctions, are grievous. This is the sentiment advanced in the text. Christ assures us that "his yoke is easy, and his burden light." The meaning is, that his religion is mild and reasonable in its principles and duties, that it does not impose painful rites, require costly sacrifices, nor enjoin any service inconsistent with our happiness. In the two preceding verses Christ invites "all that labour and are heavy laden" to accept him as their Saviour and Exemplar, and his religion as their rule of life. "Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest to your souls." The invitation is to those that labour, and are heavy burdened, whether with the distresses of life, with

a sense of guilt, or with the load of ceremonial observances other religions impose. With this invitation to come to him, take his yoke, and learn of him, he connects a promise of rest to those who accept it; and, lest any should imagine that the terms, on which the fulfilment of the promise is suspended, are not mild and equal, he assures us that his yoke is easy, and his burden light.

In this concluding discourse to young people, I shall endeavour to illustrate and enforce the general truth suggested in the text; which is, that christianity is a religion that imposes no hard and unreasonable duties, or restraints; but requires an easy and rational service. The points, to which I shall call your attention, are these; that Christ's disciples are subject to government; that this government is mild and good; and that the restraints it imposes contribute to the happiness of man in this life.

I. Christ's disciples are subject to government. *Christians* are "not without law to God, but under the law to Christ." They are to be in subjection to him, and make his gospel the rule of their life. His precepts and prohibitions they are bound to observe. He has enjoined upon them moral and positive duties. In some

respects restraints are imposed ; and general laws are ordained for the regulation of their temper and conduct. These things constitute the yoke, and the burden, spoken of in the text ; and they come into the general idea of the government Christ has established in his kingdom. This government, we say,

II. Is mild and good.

It lays the subjects of it under none but salutary restraints. The wise and good man will choose to be under the direction of christian rules and maxims, because most congenial to his temper, and conducive of his happiness. Their observance, far from being painful, affords inward satisfaction. He is persuaded that the laws of Christ's kingdom are suited to the state of man, and that, so far as he is governed by them, he shall be free and happy. In his estimation they require nothing inconsistent with the dignity and improvement of human nature.

Christianity requires a strict government of heart and life. It therefore operates as a restraint upon the passions ; but no further than reason perceives to be for our good. An unbounded indulgence of our passions would reduce us to degrading slavery, and make us restless and unhappy. It is the design of religion

to restore reason to its proper authority, and to give it the control and direction of all our passions. When this shall be effected, we shall realize that Christ's yoke is easy, that his laws impose no unnecessary burden.

In its rites and positive duties, as well as in its moral precepts, christianity lays no yoke upon us, which we are unable to bear; but is mild and reasonable in its demands. Those, who embrace it, are required to receive baptism, and to commemorate Christ's death, by celebrating the ordinance of the holy supper. These sacred rites are appointed to be observed by every disciple. They are called positive duties; but will it be pretended that they are hard and unreasonable? Would submission to Christ's authority, in these instances, be bowing your necks to a galling yoke, and taking upon your shoulders an oppressive burden? A person, that has not the heart of an infidel, would blush at the thought of making any such pretence.

Christianity, in its whole structure and design, is a system admirably suited to the state and character of man. It requires no quality which does not afford satisfaction, and add dignity, to its possessor; nor does it forbid any disposition, or action, which would not debase and injure a person.

Supreme love to God, and fervent piety toward him, are injoined by the laws of Christ. Will any, on this account, think them hard and unreasonable? None will make such a confession.

We are commanded to love others as ourselves, and to do to them as we would that they should do to us. Does this furnish ground of complaint against christianity? Did not its great founder discover even more benevolence than such precepts require? Behold him suffering and dying for you, and learn from his example what ought to be your disposition and conduct toward fellow creatures. The duties you owe to them are no burden to him who understands his own interest. As the laws of Christ relate to the temper and conduct of others toward you, it is presumed you can perceive that they are wise and good; and why should they appear less fit in their application to your own temper and conduct toward fellow beings? Judge by this rule, and your objections will be silenced.

Self-government is another branch of christian duty. In this, perhaps, persons are most sensible of the restraints of religion; but in no instance does christianity more directly promote our happiness; for "he that hath no rule over

his own spirit, is like a city that is broken down, and without walls."

Meekness and humility are opposed to our natural pride and high conceit of ourselves, and in this sense are restraints; but they are such as promote our own improvement, and evince the excellency of the religion which imposes them.

Christianity, it is true, calls us to some self-denying duties; but these are burdensome to those only, who attempt to regulate their external behaviour by it, when they have not cordially embraced its principles, nor imbibed its spirit. This however, is no fault in the religion itself; but is chargeable to the temper of their own minds, which this religion is designed to correct. Sin has introduced disorder into the soul of man, and subjected him to the dominions of lust and passion, to inquietude, to a sense of guilt, and to the fear and expectation of God's righteous displeasure. The gospel dispensation, or the religion Christ taught, is designed to remedy these evils, and, by the most mild and gentle means the case will admit, to raise fallen creatures to the enjoyment of the divine favour. This leads me to observe,

III. That the restraints, which christianity imposes, contribute to the happiness of man in this life.

In the present state of imperfection uninterrupted felicity is not to be expected. The highest we can enjoy results from an approving conscience and from hope toward God. Religion restrains us from those things only, which would destroy inward peace, and lessen the ground of hope. So far as it has this effect, it is productive of present advantage. The objection against christianity, that it requires us to deny ourselves, take up the cross, and follow the example of its author, proves the excellency of the system; for restraint upon the corrupt passions of the heart, upon the irregular propensities of our nature, is necessary to our enjoying an approving conscience. Shame and remorse will be the certain fruit of criminal indulgence. The laws of Christ are designed to prevent this, and to lead us to exercise those pure and holy affections, and to pursue that pious and virtuous course of conduct, which afford present satisfaction, and, in retrospect, will give peace to the mind. The prohibitions, as well as the precepts, are therefore a beneficial part of the christian system; and, so far as they are regarded, promote human happiness. A consciousness that we have been withholden from those things which are forbidden by the

divine law, though it may be deemed a negative kind of goodness, will be a source of pleasure. But active and uniform obedience to the whole law of Christ will increase our hope and confidence; and thus sweeten the bitterest cup of life.

The apostle John says, "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous." The meaning is, that obedience to the divine law is the best evidence, or the certain effect, of true love to God; and that his law is not grievous in its operation, but founded in the reason and fitness of things, and perfectly accommodated to the state of those, for whose government it is ordained. Solomon says of wisdom, which intends true religion, that "her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths peace." By the mouth of these witnesses every word is established. Christ's yoke must be easy, and his burden light; all the laws of his kingdom mild, and even the restraints they impose conducive to present happiness.

As an improvement of the discourse, let me entreat you, my young friends, to embrace the Lord Jesus Christ by faith, to take his yoke upon you, and learn of him, that you may find rest to your souls. You must perceive, if you

have attended to the matter, that the common prejudices against his religion are entirely groundless. What these are you have probably heard from the mouth of his enemies. Some pretend that his laws are cruel impositions, that his religion depresses the spirit of man, that it is calculated only for the weak, melancholy, or miserable, who are incapacitated, by the particular frame of their minds, for the enjoyments of life. Others hardly allow that the precepts of christianity admit the possibility of uniform obedience. Some, however, entertain thoughts a little more favourable to christianity, and acknowledge the possibility of conforming to its general principles and duties; but they seem to think that the laws of Christ's kingdom are too arbitrary and oppressive; that obedience would be difficult and unreasonable, and hence satisfy themselves without attempting to keep his commandments.

But, be assured, my friends, that they, who entertain such unfavourable notions of religion, must form their opinions from false apprehensions of a matter, with which they are not acquainted. Is any precept of the gospel unreasonable, or impracticable? Is any thing impossible required? If not, the religion is in itself a

practicable system; its most difficult duties may be discharged. There are none, from which you need to shrink; none that can excite just alarm.

Will it be said that the impossibility of obedience to Christ does not lie in any particular instance of duty; but that it arises from the whole collective sum of duty? This is no objection at all, unless it can be proved that one command is in opposition to another, or that he requires us to perform one act or duty at the very time we are obliged to be engaged in another of a different nature. This cannot be pretended. In a collective view, then, his laws are not grievous. They are restraints, it is true, upon the turbulent passions and licentious practices of men, so far as their authority is felt; but these restraints, like those imposed by every wise and good government, are of the greatest utility.

If we limit our views to the present state, Christ's yoke is easy, or his government mild and beneficial. But, connect the present effect and the future consequences of submission to his laws, and it will appear that he requires no more than every wise person would, if he understood his best interest, perform for his own

sake. The reason is, because the precepts and prohibitions of his religion conspire to rectify the temper and improve the moral faculties, to draw forth the best affections and prompt to the most worthy course of behaviour, to procure respect and give mental pleasure. Christianity requires no painful austerity of manners; nor does it consist in unreasonable self-denial, in bloody rites, nor costly sacrifices; but in grateful love to God, lively faith in Christ, generous benevolence to men, and cheerful obedience to the divine will.

To suppose it will abridge present happiness, or that it is fit only for weak minds, or gloomy spirits, betrays extreme ignorance of its principles, design, and genuine effect. We need no further proof that the person, who cherishes such notions, has never taken Christ's yoke upon him, never entered into the spirit of his gospel, nor understood the laws of his kingdom. From such you are not to expect a fair and just representation of the doctrines and duties of christianity. Their judgment is warped by their passions and prejudices. If it were not, they would perceive that religion is the glory of man, and the basis of human happiness; that it puri-

fies the heart, regulates the life, and refines every enjoyment.

My young friends, be persuaded to give the subject a fair and candid examination. Strip religion of every thing that does not properly belong to it, and it will appear as lovely, as it is important. Never listen to the suggestions of infidelity, nor to the objections made by the lovers of this world, and of its pleasures; but hearken to the voice of your own consciences. On the choice you make your hopes and eternal interest depend. If you deny Christ before men, he will deny you before his Father and the holy angels; but if you receive him as the Lord your righteousness, submit to the laws of his kingdom, and imitate his example, he will give you rest, and raise you to the joys of heaven. May God, by his good spirit, incline you to the study and practice of pure and undefiled religion, and crown your life with his richest blessings. May you be "in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption;" and may "Christ be in you the hope of glory."

AMEN.